

IN QUEST OF NARGUN AND NYOLS: A HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS TOURISM AT THE BUCHAN CAVES RESERVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned to document tourism and indigenous heritage values associated with the Buchan Caves Reserve in Gippsland, Victoria, Australia. It shows that indigenous values have not been at the forefront of the development of the tourism product at the Buchan Reserve. The inattention to Aboriginal values within the development of tourism may best be understood as a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. Indigenous values of places were rarely discussed because they were not in the eye of the vision, 'out of sight' and 'out of mind'. Indigenous tourism at Buchan does not challenge this understanding.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned to document tourism and indigenous heritage values associated with the Buchan Caves Reserve in Gippsland, Victoria, Australia. The cultural milieu of the 1840s Europe had seen a shift in the values of romanticism, in which emphasis was placed on feeling emotional about the natural world and 'scenery was something one could gaze at with delight'. Added to this re-valuing was the effect of the rise of natural history and the studies in geology that were emphasizing the great age of the world. (Urry 1997: 20) explains that 'Individual pleasures were to be derived from an appreciation of impressive physical sites'. He considers that romanticism led to the development of 'scenic tourism'. An essential interest in this new sensibility was caves and other geological curiosities. Caves were fine examples of 'nature's handiwork', and the perception of caves partly as grottos was consistent with romanticism and attempts at domesticating the landscape (Davidson & Spearritt 2000: 8).

THE BUCHAN CAVES: A HISTORY

European settlement began in the Buchan district in 1837, and the presence of large caverns at Buchan was mentioned in Stuart Ryrie's 1840 report (Ryrie 1840). The first mention in tourism literature of tourism at the caves dates from *Bailliere's Victorian Gazetteer and Road Guide* of 1879 where mention is made of caves near the Buchan township (Aitken 1994). Similar brief references to the 'famous Buchan caves' appeared in Broome (1882, 1884) and Pickersgill (1885). However, the earliest known reference to tourist use of the caves is believed to be RS Broome's (1886) *Our Guide to the Gippsland Lake*.

In 1889 the first geological surveying commenced. James Stirling, Assistant Government Geologist with the Mines Department, published in 1889 a

description of Duke, O'Rourke, and Dickson (Dixon) caves, and the Spring Creek, Wilson Creek, and Murrindal caves. He recommended that the Buchan Caves be developed as a tourist attraction, along the lines of the Jenolan Caves in New South Wales. Stirling made ground plans of the Buchan and neighbouring caves and heliotype plates from the expedition photographs by J H Harvey, illustrating views in Wilson and Dickson caves. The status of these photographs (and others by Harvey not published in the report) has long been seen as being the first – but a much earlier photograph has now come to light and its provenance is currently being sought for confirmation (E Hamilton-Smith pers. comm. 17/5/2007).



Frank Moon (top) outside the entrance to Fairy Cave, Buchan

A E Kitson, a geologist with the Mines Department, in 1900 reported on the caves along Spring Creek. He recommended that cave reservations be set apart along Spring and Cave

(now Fairy) creeks, at Dickson, Slocombe, and Wilson caves, in the vicinity of The Pyramids and at the Camping Reserve south of the Dickson Cave area.

The 'Temple of Peace', Royal Cave, Buchan



By 1900 many of the more accessible portions of the caves had been damaged by vandalism, but Kitson recommended that outstanding features should be preserved and suggested new passages and chambers would likely be found along unexplored portions of the cave complex. As a result of Kitson's report 65 ha, being the unsold portion of the Buchan township, were set aside as a caves reserve by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey (Government Gazette 19/7/1901; Swift 1951: 3), and 48 ha adjoining this in the vicinity of the Spring Creek caves were also reserved (Government Gazette 29/1/1902).

The 'Fairy Cave' was 'discovered' by Francis (Frank) Herbert Arthur Moon, a local Buchan resident and prospector, on 16 March 1907. He saw a small hole or crevice in the side of a hill, and enlarged it with some gelignite, and descended fifty feet to what is now known as 'Fairy Cave' (Salierno 1987:55). Dr John Flynn, a Presbyterian Home Missioner in Buchan during 1905-6 (McPheat 1963), accompanied Moon on many of his earlier cave excursions, and then paid a brief visit to the newly discovered Fairy Cave. His photographs were influential in persuading the Victorian Government to open the caves for tourism. Paths were constructed through the cave and wire netting installed to protect the decorations. Fairy Cave was opened to the public in December 1907. Initially, lighting

was provided by candles given to the visitors and magnesium lamps used by the guides. Electricity was connected in 1920 when a generating plant was installed, and this was used until 1969 when State Electricity Commission power was connected. Subsequently there has been much upgrading of the Caves and associated infrastructure.

The 'Royal Cave' was located in November 1910, by a party led by Frederick J Wilson, Caves Supervisor of the Buchan Reserve since 1907, and formerly the manager of the Jenolan Caves in New South Wales (Swift 1951: 6). The others were Frank Moon and Constable Brown, a local policeman (Allen correspondence 28/5/1968 in File 'Caves and Tourism'; Brown 1920). At Royal Cave, in 1913, William H Bonwick and William Foster, reserve employees, cut through a solid block of black marble, and used a large quantity of explosives to get through 150 feet. The cave opened to the public in November 1913.

'Federal Cave' was discovered in March 1915 by Wilson and Bonwick, and possibly Frank Moon (Moon 1985). In 1917, a tunnel was cut from the northern end of the Federal Cave, and in November of that year, the public was able to enter the cave (Dept. Crown Lands and Survey, 1975: 11). Thus, the entrances to the three show caves are artificial.

In July 1918, a committee of Management was constituted which continued until its reconstitution as an advisory committee in 1946.

In 1926, the Swanston Motor Tourist Bureau was offering tours, inclusive of accommodation, to the Australian Alps, Mount Buffalo, Omeo, Gippsland Lakes, and Buchan (8 days, cost £12.10s), and to the Gippsland Lakes and the Buchan Caves (8 days, £9.10s) (Wells 1986:258).

The caves area which was reserved in 1901 had long been used for camping and was subjected to a number of changes in reservation status and regulations. But a major change came in August 1930 when Hugh Linaker was commissioned to landscape the reserve. Then in December 1938, after extensive construction of new camping and recreational facilities the Buchan Caves National Park was officially opened.

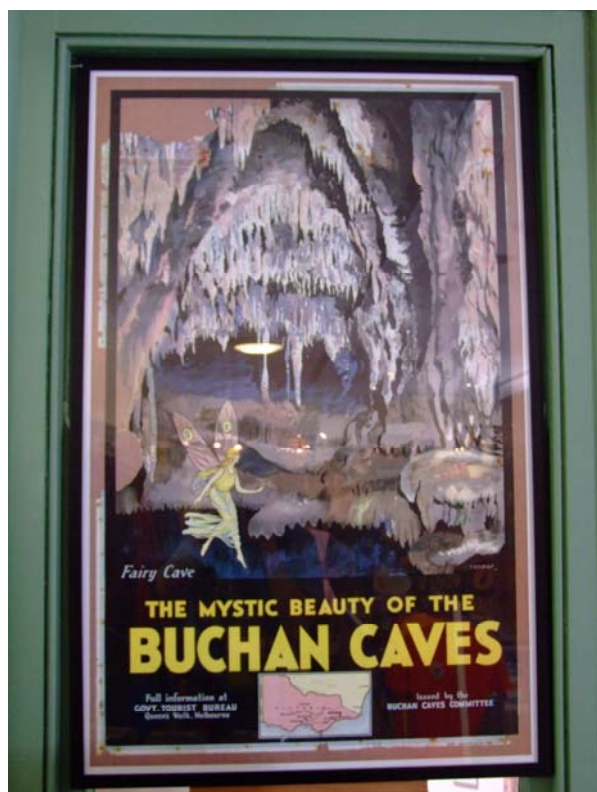
The caves were closed to the public for four years from February 1942 owing to the fact that every staff member enlisted for military service during the Second World War (Swift 1951: 7).

In 1946, an Advisory Committee, under the chairmanship of EJ Pemberton, was formed to advise the Department of Crown Lands and Survey, on the development, maintenance and supervision of the caves. In 1951, the advisory committee comprised representatives from the Departments of Lands and Survey; Public Works; Victorian Railways, and a Lands Officer from Bairnsdale (Swift 1951: 6).

In 1991, a draft management plan for the karst and cave resources in the Buchan and Murrindal

area was produced (Boadle 1991). In that plan, it was stated that the Buchan Caves Reserves consist of nine separate blocks, the largest being immediately west of the Township of Buchan, generally known as the 'Buchan Caves Reserve'. Archaeological values were listed as one of the values of the area, defined as 'Cloggs cave was occupied by aboriginals approximately 18,000 years ago. Such sites as this were highly significant (Boadle 1991: 6). Research at Cloggs Cave had revealed important paleo-environmental and paleo-climatic information, in addition to its heritage values (Boadle 1991: 12). Recommended actions listed in the draft management plan, included that 'The aboriginal history of the region will be included in interpretive activities (Boadle 1991: 29)'.

In 1994, Richard Aitken, prepared a Classification Report for the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) of the Buchan Caves Reserve. Aitken considered the Buchan Reserve ranked second to the Jenolan Caves Reserve in New South Wales, in terms of its contemporary popularity, impact on local and regional development, surviving attributes and historical importance. The Buchan Reserve contains many fine examples of protective features, and the period and nature of the tourist development is comparable with places such as Mt Buffalo Chalet. A notable feature of the Buchan Caves Reserve is the degree to which it has been modelled on the United States of America National Parks Service, particularly the adoption of 'parkitecture' styles for some of its buildings.



Historic Buchan Caves Poster, from Elery Hamilton Smith's display at the 2007 ACKMA Conference. Photo: Rauleigh Webb.

ABORIGINAL SPATIAL ORGANIZATION IN THE BUCHAN DISTRICT

The Buchan Caves National Park falls within the Krauatungalung language area (Clark 1998:189-190). This language or dialect, is one of five normally referred to as the 'Ganai nation' or 'Kurnai nation', a cluster of dialects sharing linguistic, social, cultural, political, and family associations. According to Howitt (1904:76) Krauatungalung is derived from 'krauat' meaning 'east, and 'galung' meaning 'of' or 'belonging to'. Hence the name means 'belonging to the east', or 'of the east', and the name serves to differentiate, geographically, these dialect speakers from other Ganai or Kurnai dialects. The placename Croajingalong is a corruption of Krauatungalung.

There may have been a clan centred on Buchan, known as the Buchan mitting (Howitt Papers 1876 in Wesson 1994: 48). Robinson (Mackaness 1941: 17) referred to a 'Buchan tribe', but this may be a general reference, like the term 'Loddon tribe', or 'Yarra tribe'. Howitt's (1904: 80) reference to a man belonging to 'Bukkan munji', is a reference to the place, which Howitt stated should be referred to as Bukkan munji, and not as Buchan. Thus, Bukkan munji is a place name, and not a clan name.

Within the ethno-historical records and general literature on Buchan, several meanings and derivations are given for the name 'Buchan'. GA Robinson, for example, spelt Buchan several ways: Buckun (Jnl 3/6/1844); Buckin (Jnl 17/6/1844); Bucking (Jnl 21/6/1844); Bukkan (Jnl 4/7/1844); and Bucken (Jnl 5/7/1844).

One view is that it is of Scottish, or pseudo-Scottish, origin (Howitt 1904: 80; Seddon 1994:63; Morgan 1997: 21). The BSC (1989: 8) suggested that the many people of Scottish origin who settled in the district were responsible for the current spelling 'Buchan', after the town in Scotland.

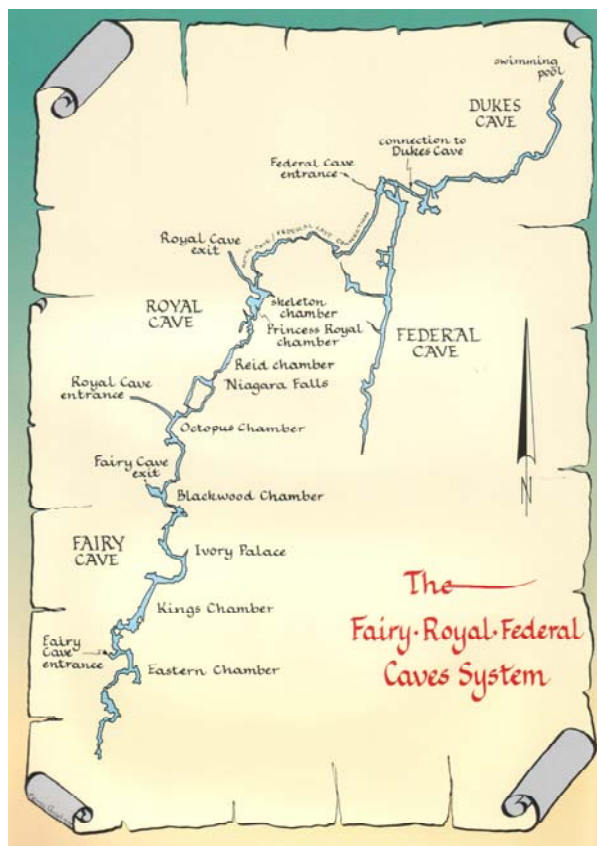
Another is that it derives from the word 'bukin' or 'bugin', a medicine-man of supernatural ability, dreaded because he stole human kidney fat its magical properties' (Roberts 1977:14). Roberts speculated that perhaps the caves were haunts of the dreaded Bukin. The BSC (1989: 8) claimed the Bukin inhabited caves. According to Howitt, the Baukan was an evil spirit of which little could be learned. He was only able to state they were negative, but not very powerful, and consequently not much feared (Fison & Howitt 1880: 254).

A third is that it was called Bukkan-munji (Howitt 1904: 80); Bukkan Munjie (Fison & Howitt 1880: 192; Salierno 1987:51), Bukkanmungie (Gardner 1992: 17), Buk Kan Munjie, Bukinmunjie (Seddon 1994:62). Howitt (1904: 80) noted that Bukkan-munji was 'the native name for the bag in which the Kurnai carries various articles', and literally means 'bag there' or 'the place of the bag'. According to Seddon (1994: 62) the name signifies a carrying bag, the common suffix 'munjie' indicating 'women's article'. Gardner (1992: 17) translates Bukkanmungie as 'place of the

woman's bag'. The BSC (1989: 8), however, translate mungie as 'water'. Another translation is 'Grass bag' (BSC 1989: 8).

William Thomas informed the Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines, in 1861, that 'Buccan' meant 'stack of rocks with a hole in it' (Pepper and De Araugo 1985: 120). The tourist brochure 'Buchan Visitors Guide Snowy River Country', produced by the Buchan Tourist Association in conjunction with Lakes and Wilderness Tourism, in a variant of Thomas' entry, claimed Bukan-Mungie means 'place of rocks with holes in them'. According to Roberts the specific area from which Buchan Mungie is supposed to take its name is near the junction of the Tarra Creek with the Buchan River; an area where cliff section reveals sharply folded and contorted limestone strata, and close to recently discovered Aboriginal caves.

The Ganai word for 'cave' was most likely to be the equivalent of their word for hole, 'Ngrung' (Fison & Howitt 1880: 191), which is used in reference to the 'hole of Nargun'.



Map of the Buchan Caves System

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE VALUES AT BUCHAN CAVES

In 1952, Robert H. Lavelle submitted a draft manuscript about the Buchan Caves to the Department of Crown Lands and Survey. A copy of this manuscript is on file at the Parks Victoria Buchan Office. The manuscript is entitled 'Buchan Caves Victoria Australia: Australia's most wonderful Caves'. It was Lavelle's intention to submit the manuscript to the London

magazine, *Wide World Magazine*. It has not been possible to confirm if the article was ever published. The manuscript is of interest because it contains interpretation of the significance of the caves, as well a description of the site by an Aboriginal man named Harry Belmont.

The Aboriginal tribes who inhabited these domains know of the caves from time immemorial, and for the reason that parts were used by the Headmen as a secret ritual ground, their existence was closely kept secret, and only by the chance of an inquisitive boy were they discovered in 1891 (Lavelle 1952: 1).

Regarding the scenic setting of the caves, Lavelle (1952: 4) noted:

The whole is a dream of Paradise, without saints; that is unless you are willing to admit that the natural fauna are the spirits of the Saints, as the aboriginals do.

The best description I ever heard was uttered to me by an aboriginal friend, 'Harry Belmont', who pointed to the caves and said in his own tongue; 'Bogong, Murryang, Biamee'. I asked him for the translation of those three phonetic words. It is: Bogong: the birthplace of a great spirit. Murryang: we meet in that dream land at the end of the ocean where Biamee lives. Biamee: God, or Great Spirit. This, truly is the finest description one can give of the Buchan Caves: 'Paradise on earth'.

He concluded with a discussion of Aboriginal place names:

Curious unfamiliar names, such as Gelantipy and Wulgulmerang Ranges convey only a hint of the original inhabitants the aboriginals (Lavelle 1952?: 5).

It has not been possible to learn anything about Harry Belmont. His name is not entered into the Aboriginal Biographical Index at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. The index to marriages in New South Wales does list a marriage in 1926 in Sydney of one Harold Belmont to Vida Brown (Registration No. 11395). Preliminary analysis of the three Aboriginal words listed by Lavelle, as derived from Belmont, does suggest a connection with New South Wales. Biamee is likely to be a reference to 'baayama' meaning 'god', listed in Austin's (1992: 53) dictionary of the Gamilaraay language of northern New South Wales spoken at places such as Moree, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Tamworth, and Boggabilla. Ridley (in Smyth 1878, Vol. 2: 285) confirms that Baime (pronounced by-a-me) was used by Aboriginal groups scattered across northwest and west New South Wales, and was used by the Wiradjuri people at Mudgee and other localities. 'Bogong' is a Ngarigu word for the brown moth *Agrotis infusa* which breeds on plains in southern Australia (Dixon *et al* 1992). Adult moths migrate to mountains where they collect in rock crevices in early summer and were harvested by Aboriginal people and were a staple food source at this time. This understanding of bogong diverges from that given by Belmont. It has not

been possible to find any reference to the other word.

When the Bataluk Cultural Trail was being developed in the mid-1990s, see below, the brochure, which was printed in 1995, stated the following about the Aboriginal heritage of the Caves themselves. Traditionally Koorie people did not venture deep into the limestone caves at Buchan. There were, however, many stories about the wicked and mischievous Nyols which live in the caves below the earth.

Phillip Pepper recalled that in the early 1900s, his father, Percy Pepper was a friend of Frank Moon. They shared a passion for foot running, and would often run together. They would also go rabbiting together. Phillip recalled that his father was setting rabbit traps with Frank Moon on one occasion when Moon 'found one of the caves at Buchan' (Pepper & De Araugo 1989: 53).

In Gippsland, caves are associated with two mythical beings; the Nargun and the Nyol. In 1875, Alfred William Howitt explored the Mitchell River by canoe accompanied by two Ganai men - Turnmile and Bunjil Bottle (Seddon 1989). Up one creek, known as Deadcock Creek, they came to a cavern. Howitt noted that his companions expressed delight upon finding this cavern, and planned to return and camp there and collect the tails of the woorayl (lyrebird) among the scrubs of the river, and feast on koalas and wallabies. A little further on, they came to a second cave, fringed by stalactites. The two Ganai men removed some stalactites to show their friends. Bunjil Bottle was convinced that this was the haunt of the mysterious creature, the nargun, the 'ngrung a narguna' (Seddon 1989: 18). The nargun, is a mysterious creature, a cave dweller that haunts various parts of the bush. Howitt learned that they especially haunt the Mitchell Valley. Howitt's companions could not describe a nargun, beyond that it is like a rock (wallung), and is said to be all stone except the breast and arms and hands. It inhabits caverns, into which it drags unsuspecting passers-by. Howitt knew of another cave in the Miocene limestones of Lake Tyers that was said to be inhabited by a nargun (Seddon 1989: 18).



Part of the Historic display, from Elery Hamilton Smith's collection, at the 2007 ACKMA Conference. Photo: Rauleigh Webb.

Smyth (1878, Vol. 1: 456-7) presented the following account of the 'Nrung-a-Narguna':

A mysterious creature, Nargun – a cave-dweller – inhabits various places in the bush. He haunts especially the valley of the Mitchell in Gippsland. He has many caves; and if any blackfellow incautiously approaches one of these, that blackfellow is dragged into the cave by Nargun, and he is seen no more. If a blackfellow throws a spear at Nargun, the spear returns to the thrower and wounds him. Nargun cannot be killed by any blackfellow. There is a cave at Lake Tyers where Nargun dwells, and it is not safe for any black to go near it. Nargun would surely destroy him. A native woman once fought with Nargun at this cave, but nobody knows how the battle ended. Nargun is like a rock (Wallung), and is all of stone except the breast and the arms and the hands. No one knows exactly what he is like. Nargun is always on the lookout for blackfellows, and many have been dragged into his caves. He is a terror to the natives of Gippsland.

Massola (1968: 74-5) has recounted the story of the Nyol at Murrindal:

Once, when the tribe was camped at Murrindal, one of the men went possum hunting. Possums were plentiful on the trees growing amongst the rocks there. While he was hunting, he noticed an opening between two rocks. He put his foot in it and was drawn in.

He found himself in one of the many caves in the vicinity. The cave was lit by a strange light,

and was inhabited by many very small people who came to him showing signs of friendship. They called him Jambi, which is a general term for friendship, although it means brother-in-law. He tried to get back above the surface, but found that he had to wrestle with the little people. They were very strong, although small, and although he fought many of them, they all overcame him.

Feeling exhausted he lay down to rest. The little people, the Nyols, gave him rugs to sleep on and grubs to eat. The latter were a great delicacy, and he enjoyed them very much. At last, many of the Nyols went away and he was left in the charge of one of them. Everything had been quiet, but now he heard a rustling sound. One of the Nyols came to him saying he would show him the way to the surface of the ground. Before very long he was amongst his own people, but for several days could not tell them what had happened to him. His mind had temporarily gone blank.

INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS VALUES IN BUCHAN TOURISM

This discussion is concerned to show how indigenous values at Buchan have been incorporated into the tourism values at the Buchan reserve. The first major attempt at such incorporation came in the mid-1990s with the development of an indigenous tourism trail in Gippsland. The Bataluk Cultural Trail launched in 1995 is a collaborative project between five Aboriginal community organizations in East Gippsland and local government, concerned with cultural and eco-tourism. The five community organizations are the Far East Gippsland Aboriginal Corporation; Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative; Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust; Moogji Aboriginal Council; and Ramahyuck Aboriginal Corporation. The trail integrated 12 separate cultural sites, stretching from Sale to Cann River.

Regional officers of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources were informed in December 1994, by the facilitator of the trail project that the Den of Nargun in the Mitchell River National Park and Buchan Caves had been identified as important stops along the trail, and that they were to be included in the Aboriginal Cultural Trail.

Trail brochures were published and distributed from May 1995 (East Gippsland Institute of TAFE 1996: 13). The trail was officially launched on 27 October 1995 by the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, at the Knob Reserve at Stratford, one of the sites of the trail. The Buchan Caves are Site 8 of these 12 sites, where the focus is carvings, archaeological sites 12,000 years old, Dreamtime stories and creatures.

Visitation through the show caves during the decade 1981-91 averaged 85,082 people per year, with approximately 160,000 visiting the Main Reserve each year (Boadle 1991: 41). Boadle (1991: 44), in a draft management plan,

recognized the important role played by visitor facilities and services at the Main Reserve, and highlighted the need for information provided to be of a high standard, and recommended the production of a high quality brochure for tourists. The plan acknowledged that the Main Reserve was a focus of tourist activity, and an educational centre visited by many secondary and tertiary groups. In relation to the content of the information given by guides during guided tours of the show caves, the draft management plan detailed the range of subjects guides needed to understand to maintain the quality and accuracy of information given. Aboriginal history and heritage was not included in this list.

In 1995, the Buchan Caves Committee of Management received a grant of \$6,000 from the National Estates Grant Program. The project involved the production of an interpretation display located at the Buchan Caves Reserve, focussing on the significance of Aboriginal culture in the Buchan area, particularly Cloggs Cave (Calnin 1997). It was emphasized in the application that the Aboriginal heritage of the Buchan district was something the visitors to the Buchan Caves complex were 'not normally exposed to'. It was also suggested that the content of the display would be able to be incorporated into the information usually presented during guided tours of the show caves. The project brief noted that the interpretive display should feature a concept/theme related to refuge or shelter; follow a similar format, style, and colour scheme of the interpretive signs that had recently been designed by the Buchan Caves Friends Group; and the significance of Cloggs Cave related to Aboriginal occupation 18,000 years ago. The 'Cloggs Cave interpretation sign' was installed at the Buchan Caves Reserve in August 1996.

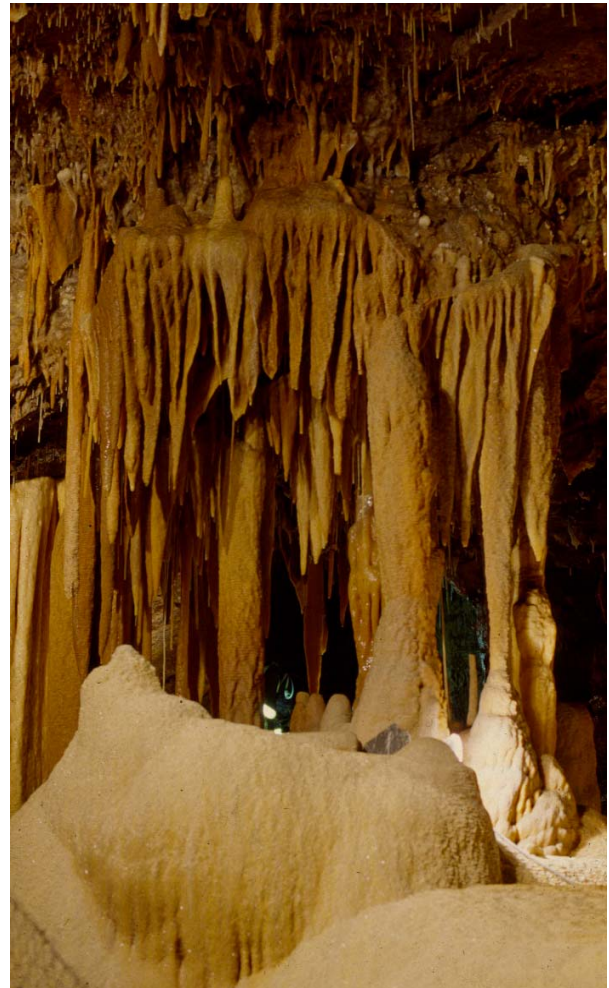
In October 1996, Urban Spatial and Economic Consultants Pty Ltd (USEC) completed an audit of the tourism infrastructure of Gippsland. They identified the Bataluk Cultural Trail had state-wide significance (USEC 1996: iii). The Bataluk project was prioritized as it offered the visitor to Gippsland a unique Aboriginal perspective. They considered the trail required minimal capital input and provided opportunity and flow on effects for the Aboriginal population of the region (USEC 1996: 22). In an analysis of the trail, USEC (1996: 85) claimed that Buchan was 'where aborigines would retreat for the winter months and live in caves'.



Further image of the Historic display, from Elery Hamilton Smith's collection, at the 2007 ACKMA Conference. Photo: Rauleigh Webb.

In 1997, I D Clark and L Larrieu produced an indigenous tourism strategy for Victoria for the Mirimbiak Nations Aboriginal Corporation. This strategy was the result of six months of research and consultation with Victorian indigenous peoples and key stakeholders in the industry. In relation to the Lakes and Wilderness tourism region of Tourism Victoria, which includes Buchan, consultations were held with Aboriginal community representatives in Sale, Orbost, and Lake Tyers.

Clark and Larrieu (1997: 28) recommended series of pilot projects to ensure that their strategy was of practical value and achieved desired community outcomes. One pilot project centred on the Bataluk Cultural Trail, where it was recommended that a detailed tourism plan be produced. Despite the production of a glossy trail brochure, development of the trail was seen as minimal and much more development is required for the trail to become a significant tourist experience.



A scene in Royal Cave, Buchan

In 1997, Urban Spatial and Economic Consultants Pty Ltd (USEC) produced a regional tourism development plan for the Lakes and Wilderness tourism region. In terms of indigenous issues, the plan acknowledged that 'Lake Tyers and Buchan were significant current Aboriginal tourism areas' (USEC 1997: 10). Aboriginal tourism, via the Bataluk Cultural Trail, was identified as a product strength of the region.

The development plan recommended the development of the Snowy River as a 'heritage icon'; development of the Buchan township and Buchan Caves as a heritage precinct for the region; and further expansion of the Bataluk Cultural Trail (USEC 1997: 40). However, their analysis of Buchan identified the further development of Aboriginal tourism product as an 'opportunity' (USEC 1997: 9-10).

In December 1997, Box *et al* produced an ecotourism strategy for Far East Gippsland, for Parks Victoria and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. Its purpose was to provide direction and co-ordination of ecotourism development and activity in the region over the following five years. It was found that approximately 472,000 people annually visited public land in East Gippsland, 332,000 to parks and reserves, and 140,000 to state forests (Box *et al* 1997:8). Major tourist interests were found to be bird watching, geology, bushwalking, and

general outdoor activities. In relation to Buchan, the caves reserve was recognized as a regional example of a natural area intensively managed for high levels of recreation.

The caves in the Buchan–Mid Snowy River area were recognized for their geological values, and ‘many have a history of aboriginal use as well (Box *et al* 1997: 19)’. It was acknowledged that liaison should occur with the ‘Aboriginal community regarding interpretation of aboriginal history’.

The ecotourism strategy noted that interest in experiencing Aboriginal art, history and culture had increased in recent years. It was acknowledged that Far East Gippsland is richly endowed with Aboriginal culture and excellent opportunities exist for ecotourism enterprises based on interpretation of traditional Aboriginal cultural practices, places and events.

The degree to which such opportunities are developed ultimately depends on the wishes of local Aboriginal communities who are the custodians of their culture. A recent initiative has been the development of the Bataluk Cultural Trail which extends through much of East Gippsland, from Sale in the west, to Cann River in the east. The Trail includes numerous points of cultural interest where further on-site information will be provided (Box *et al* 1997: 21).

In terms of visitor amenities and services, opportunities were found to exist for on site information boards, interpretive walks, and guided tours and activities. Along existing tourist drives and key walking tracks more on-site interpretation facilities were recommended. Aboriginal culture was identified as one of the more popular themes to be considered (Box *et al* 1997: 36).

In early 1999, Parks Victoria undertook a visitor survey at the Buchan Caves Reserve. In February 1999, circa 250 responses were received and processed. Yet, of these responses, only four,

representing less than two per cent, requested more information about indigenous values.

In 2002–03 visitor interpretation at the Buchan Caves Visitor Centre was redeveloped by Spellbound Interpretation in close association with the Moogji Aboriginal Cooperative and staff at AAV and Parks Victoria. New installations addressed the Indigenous cultural heritage of the Buchan Caves, the Buchan District, and the Snowy River Valley.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a history of tourism of the Buchan caves with a particular emphasis on the focus on indigenous values associated with the caves. Despite the fact that there are indigenous values they have not been at the forefront of the development of the tourism product at the Buchan Reserve until 2002. Interpretive signage installed in 1996 presented tourists with some understanding of this heritage, although its focus was general and did not mention the rich accounts of malevolent spirits such as *nargun* and *nyols* that were associated with caves.

Foremost in the development of the caves for scenic tourism was the view that they were ‘natural wonders’, and the question of whether or not they were of significance to local indigenous interests did not appear to have been asked – indeed, except in areas where indigenous values are obvious, such as at rock art sites, exclusion was the rule, and not the exception.

The inattention to Aboriginal values within the development of tourism may best be understood as a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. Indigenous values of places were rarely discussed because they were not in the eye of the vision, ‘out of sight’ and ‘out of mind’. Until the last ten years, indigenous tourism at Buchan did not challenge this understanding.

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Internet Sites

<<http://www.comu.net.au/tour/ndx/boorun.html>>

Titled 'Boorun the pelican – explore Aboriginal East Gippsland'. The internet site of the Bataluk Cultural Trail, the brochure in electronic format.

<<http://www.tourism.net.au/victoria/lakes/default.htm>>

The web site for the Lakes and Wilderness tourism region has an oblique reference to Koori culture as a thing to see. It promotes the Den of Nargun, a shallow cave, as significant in local Aboriginal culture, however, there is no reference to indigenous values at the Buchan Caves Reserve.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Dr Ian D. Clark is an Associate Professor in Tourism in the School of Business at the University of Ballarat. He has a Doctorate in Aboriginal Historical Geography from Monash University. He has been a Lecturer in Tourism Management at Monash University, Research Fellow in History at AIATSIS, Manager of the Brambuk Living Cultural Centre in Halls Gap, and Senior Researcher with the former Victorian

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Further image of the Historic display, from Elery Hamilton Smith's collection, at the 2007 ACKMA Conference. Photo: Rauleigh Webb.