

A caving pioneer: Frank Moon and the caves of Buchan

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The Buchan Caves have long been a regional icon in East Gippsland, drawing up to 88,000 visitors a year from all parts of Australia and overseas. The premier tourist caves, Fairy Cave and Royal Cave are the most famous caves in the Buchan and Snowy River areas, however they are but two of the 425 known caves in the district and doubtless there are others; each one a unique subterranean wonderland awaiting exploration by speleologists and inquisitive adventurers.¹

Over a period of many years there has been considerable debate about by whom, how and when the caves of Buchan were first discovered. Clearly, there is no doubt that Indigenous Australians can truly lay claim to being first and caves within the Snowy River area bear signs of Aboriginal presence and engravings that date back 22,000 years.

The provenance of contemporary cave exploration is not as clear but the one name most commonly associated with the discovery and development of the caves in Buchan is that of Frank Moon. So what was his true role in this discovery? Has he been lionized or should we in this, the centenary year of the discovery of the Fairy Cave, duly recognise his personal achievements?². Along with those

other pioneers of the Buchan caves, who have shared the experience of Mallacoota adventurer and writer Edwin James Brady, who ventured into the ‘Cimmerian night’ of Buchan’s ‘underworld’ and in 1918 wrote, ‘It gives one a curious sensation of unreality, this descent through a hole in the hillside, into a region of glamor and mystery, beautiful but weird’.³

The first recorded exploration of caves in Buchan was made by Stewart Ryrie on 7 April 1840. Accompanied by an Aboriginal guide and three soldiers he was surveying the area for the New South Wales administration when passing through the Buckan [sic] forest he noted, ‘Blue limestone abounds all over this forest and it is full of caves. I descended into one of them to a considerable depth but saw nothing remarkable’. One study published in 1992, using Ryrie’s original reckonings, suggested that the cave explored by Ryrie was ‘most likely *Moon Cave*’ but more recent work undertaken by speleologist Peter Ackroyd concluded, ‘based on the thin evidence available’ that Ryrie descended a cave now known as ‘M-22 The Garage’.⁴

Following in the tracks of Ryrie, the noted explorer Alfred William Howitt (GHJ 1-38) extensively explored the Buchan and Snowy River areas and in 1876, in a report for the Geological Survey of Victoria, he described in detail Buchan’s topography and geology.

¹Caving figures provided to author by Dale Calnin, Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves), 7 August 2006.

²Sources that lionize Frank Moon or otherwise erroneously depict him as ‘the discoverer of the Buchan Caves’ include: Howard D. Bulmer, *Beautiful East Gippsland*, (4th Ed.), The Author, Bairnsdale, n.d.; Nathan F. Spielvogel, *The Gumsucker at Home*, George Robertson & Company, Sydney, 1914, p. 51; Albert E. Clark, *The Church of Our Fathers*, The Diocese of Gippsland, Melbourne, 1947, p. 170; *The Weekly Times*, 18 May 1949, p. 18; David Swift, ‘Buchan - Valley of Caves’, *Mining and Geological Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4, September 1951, p. 24; *The Sun Week-End Magazine*, 30 October 1948, p. 2; David Swift, ‘This Man Spent 50 years Underground’, *The Argus - Magazine Special Supplement*, 16 November 1951, p. 3; *The Sun*,

12 October 1955; *A brief history of Buchan District and Schools*, Buchan School, Buchan, 1977.

³Linda Wilkinson, ‘Aboriginal Historical Places Along the Snowy River’, *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, No. 23, 1999, p. 7; Edwin James Brady, *Australia Unlimited*, Angus & Robertson, Melbourne, 1918, pp. 348; *ADB*, Vol. 7, ‘Edwin James Brady (1869-1952)’, pp. 386-7.

⁴‘Stewart Ryrie’s 1840 report on Gippsland’, *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, No. 11, December 1991, p. 13; *Nargun*, Vol. 24, No. 10, May 1992, p. 90; Peter Ackroyd, ‘Stewart Ryrie’s 1840 Report on East Gippsland - Buchan Area’, Unpublished paper, 10 November 2006.

Highlighting the scientific and geological potential of the caves he noted,

‘... caverns and “sink holes” abound’ but ‘No systematic exploration of these caves has, however, yet been made; it seems not impossible that some, at any rate, may be found to afford fossil remains of the extinct Australian fauna’.⁵

The first significant government move to protect the caves occurred in 1887, when the area that is today known as Wyatt’s Reserve or the Potholes, was reserved by government proclamation to specifically protect the caves and any associated natural features. The following year, James Stirling, a botanist and geologist, then employed as a Victorian government assistant geological surveyor, visited East Gippsland in company with Public Works Department architect and secretary of the Amateur Photographic Association of Victoria, John Henry Harvey. Stirling was an associate of Howitt’s and also of the noted botanist Ferdinand Mueller (GHJ 10-3) and was familiar with the Buchan area, having previously worked as a mail rider between Bruthen and Bendoc. The primary purpose of their visit was in connection with the work of prospecting parties in the Buchan District. Stirling was conversant with Howitt’s 1876 treatise on the Devonian rocks of North Gippsland and bearing Howitt’s suggestion ‘in mind’ Stirling and Harvey ‘made a temporary examination of the caves’ in Buchan, accompanied two assistants, Mr Tetu and Mr Ralston, ‘a plucky young Australian’, who was often the first of Stirling’s team to delve underground. They were guided on some of their work by William Kellie, a local publican and Buchan telegraph operator. Stirling mapped a number of the caves and Harvey, who had already photographed the Jenolan

caves, took the first known successful photographs of the Buchan caves. In 1889 the government published Stirling’s ‘Preliminary Report on the Buchan Caves’, which included detailed descriptions of a number of caves, including Duke’s, Moon’s, O’Rourke’s, Wilson’s, Dickson’s⁶, and the Spring Creek Cave. Displaying considerable prescience, Stirling foresaw the tourist potential of the caves and recommended that a caretaker be appointed and that ladders, hand-rails and lighting be installed in some of the caves. He proposed using water from the Buchan River to drive a dynamo to generate electricity. During a public lecture given in Sale soon after, on the topic of his cave tours, Stirling asked, ‘Why should not that characteristic energy which exhibited itself in the Australian cricket or football fields be directed to scientific research to discovering some of the many beauties of Australia’s subterranean wonderland?’ Stirling and Harvey ‘left no stone unturned in [their] efforts to point out the value of the caves to Victoria from a tourist’s point of view’ and Harvey referred to them in his lectures on the Jenolan Caves. So enamoured was Harvey with the Buchan caves that he twice unsuccessfully attempted to have Jeremiah Wilson, caretaker of the Jenolan Caves, brought to East Gippsland to explore them.⁷

⁶ In his report Stirling interchanged the spellings Dickson’s and Dixon’s. The correct spelling is Dickson. Reference: Buchan Sesquicentenary Committee, *Buchan-Mungie: 150 Years of Settlement in the Buchan District – 1839-1989*, Buchan, 1989, p. 102, for Dickson family.

⁷ *Victoria Government Gazette*, 23 September 1887, p. 2760 & 31 December 1901, p. 5096; H.J. Gibbney and Ann G. Smith, *A Biographical Register 1788-1939*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1987, Vol.2, p. 282; and Amie Livingstone Stirling, *Memories of an Australian Childhood 1880-1900*, Schwartz, East Melbourne, 1980, passim, for notes on Stirling; Debra Squires, et al, *Gippsland in Focus*, Kapana Press, Bairnsdale, 1990, p. 39, for note on Harvey & p. 72 for Stirling; Alan Davies, et al, *The mechanical eye in Australia: photography 1841-1900*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, pp. 94-5, for Harvey; Stirling Report, p. 66, for Kellie reference; pp. 66-7, for cave

⁵ Alfred William Howitt, ‘Notes on the Devonian Rocks of North Gippsland’, *Reports on the Geology, Mineralogy, and Physical Structure of Various Parts of the Colony*, Geological Survey of Victoria, Melbourne, 1876, pp. 203-204; James Stirling, ‘Preliminary Report on the Buchan Caves’, *Reports of the Mining Registrars for Quarter ending 31st December 1889*, (Hereafter cited as Stirling Report), P.66, for quotation; *ADB*, Vol. 4, ‘Alfred William Howitt (1830-1908)’, pp. 432-5.

Much of the early interest in the caves of Buchan centred on their potential as a tourist attraction and by the 1880s tourists to the district were able to undertake guided cave tours, often accompanied by local hotel proprietors. In 1886 'Tanjil' wrote of a guided tour through Wilson's cave, the pathway illuminated by candles and kerosene torches. On this tour the guide providing a stunning denouement when he ignited a quantity of stringy bark saturated in kerosene to show a 'fairy-land-like' display of 'thousands of stalactites and stalagmites'. The caves were promoted in tourist literature for the Gippsland Lakes and trekkers used a combination of train, steamer, motor launch and four-horse coach to make their way to Buchan. In August 1899 Sale photographer Alexander Ward addressed the Sale branch of the Australian Natives' Association about his visit to the Buchan caves. He described 'the caves country' in detail and informed his audience that,

'All the necessary articles to assist you going through the caves – such as lanterns, candles, torches, ropes, rope-ladders, poles, retracing lines, magnesium tape and other coloured lights for the purpose of showing the chambers in different colours – may be obtained at the township, and guides and horses are also available'.

It was during this era when considerable irreversible damage was caused to the caves by visitors taking cave formations as souvenirs or 'specimens'. And Ward, urging protection for the caves, lamented that it 'was a common thing for people to smash the stalactites out of pure thoughtlessness. There are tons of the broken specimens to be found about the caves'. Ward found his trek to Buchan quite arduous and told his audience, 'People are usually very glad to reach Buchan, not because they love the town, but because they have got to the end of a long journey'. In contrast, guests of the entrepreneurial John C. Dahlsen, proprietor of Lakes Tyers House, journeyed to Buchan in style. As early as 1902 Dahlsen was

descriptions; and p.68, for recommendations; J.H. Harvey, et al, 'Buchan And Its Caves', *The Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. xxiv, October 1907, p.99; *Gippsland Times*, 25 February 1889, for Stirling lecture notes.

quick to see the Buchan Caves as 'an untapped commercial treasure' and the caves figured prominently in Lake Tyers House advertising. It was a time when Lake Tyers House was the playground of the well-to-do, including prominent politicians and vice regal visitors and Dahlsen promoted holiday packages to the caves that included all meals, accommodation, launch fares and coach transport to-and-from Buchan.⁸

Although tourist operators lobbied the government and expressed the same sentiments as Stirling, his recommendations went unheeded for more than a decade and it was not until 1900 that his work was expanded upon by Albert Ernest Kitson, who was then undertaking geological field work for the Victorian Geological Survey. A Fellow of the Geological Society of London and a widely published author on matters of geology and natural history, Kitson studied and photographed the caves in 1900. He was dismayed that some of them had already, 'been greatly despoiled of their treasures by acts of pure vandalism' and observed that a number of caves, 'suffered from the vandalism, carelessness, and thoughtlessness of sightseers, who have smashed most of the smaller stalactites, stalagmites, and stalactital drapery within reach'. It was an era when, 'people were known to carry away wagon loads of cave formations'. Like Stirling before him Kitson grasped the scientific and tourist potential of the caves, describing the Buchan district as a place, 'of great interest to the lover of the beautiful in nature, and to the scientist'. He predicted that if, 'the claims of the district as a pleasure resort [are] brought prominently before the public, I have no hesitation in venturing the opinion that large numbers of tourists will be attracted during the summer and autumn months'. He proposed, 'that action be taken to preserve such of the

⁸ John D. Adams, *The Tambo Shire Centenary History*, Shire of Tambo, Bruthen, 1981, p. 201, for first Buchan cave tours; 'Tanjil', *Our Guide to the Gippsland Lakes and Rivers*, (Third edition), 1886, pp. 74-5; *The Gippsland Mercury*, 22 August 1899, for Ward notes; Peter Synan, *The Dahlsen Story – A pioneering Family in Gippsland Since 1862*, Lookups Research, Sale, 2005, pp. 25-32, passim, for Lake Tyers House & Buchan Caves.

beauties of the caves as have not yet been despoiled, and prevent vandalism in any that may be discovered in future' and recommended seven new cave reservations be established in the Buchan District: one of which, gazetted in 1901, formed the genesis of the Buchan Caves Reserve as it exists today.⁹

Despite the urgings of Stirling, Kitson and others, the tourist and scientific potential of the Buchan caves was never optimised and it fell to local caver Francis Herbert Arthur 'Frank' Moon to propel Buchan and its caves into the public spotlight. Born at Gelantipy Station on 20 November 1880, Frank Moon was one of three boys and five girls born to Robert Moon, and Margaret (nee Ross, formerly of Rosedale). Raised and educated in the Gelantipy and Buchan districts, Frank Moon was a noted horseman, athlete and bushman, good enough according to oral tradition, to walk the distance of forty-five kilometres from Buchan to Gelantipy in three hours. He once walked sixty-five kilometres from Gelantipy to Tubbut to compete in a footrace - which he won - then walked home again. Athletic feats of this nature earned Moon the sobriquet 'Cyclone'. He left Buchan aged sixteen to go prospecting on the Omeo goldfields, then went mining in Mount Lyell, Tasmania; Broken Hill, New South Wales; and Coolgardie near Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. Whilst in Coolgardie he competed in a cycling race against professional riders and won a purse of twenty-five pounds. After a period of years working away, he used his winnings to travel back to Buchan, intending to spend a brief period with his family before travelling to Argentina to work as a miner.¹⁰

⁹ Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves Collection), Letter from tourism agent J.H. Coffey, 13 August 1897; *ADB*, Vol. 9, p. 618, for Kitson; Albert Kitson, 'Proposed Reservation of Limestone Caves in the Buchan District, Eastern Gippsland', *Records of the Geological Survey of Victoria*, Vol 2, Part 1, 1907, pp. 37-44. Kitson's reports were written in 1900 and published in 1907; *Victoria Government Gazette*, 19 July 1901, p. 2772, for reservation; Adams, *The Tambo Shire*, p. 244, for wagon loads.

¹⁰ Register of Births in the District of Buchan, 1881 No. 12, for birth details; Lois Mackieson, *A Brief History of the Family of Frederick Robert and*

During his sojourn in Buchan Frank Moon 'pottered around' looking for caves and in September 1906, accompanied by his brother Robert and a friend, Jim Connors, Moon explored a cave on the northern bank of Spring Creek near its junction with the Buchan River. Previously known as O'Rourke's Cave, they extended its known limit and it was subsequently renamed Moon Cave.¹¹ A report in the *Snowy River Mail* credited 'Mr Frank Moon ... the pioneer' with this discovery but did add that 'several others' were with him. Following the discovery of more impressive caves nearby the Moon Cave was rarely used for public tours and in 1907 it was recommended 'That no steps be taken at present to improve the Moon Cave which should be kept locked up and visitors only admitted by special permit'. Many years later it was assessed as having no appreciable scientific, aesthetic, social or spiritual value. Its principal significance was found in the natural heritage value of the cave at river level as a platypus habitat. Notwithstanding the modest nature of Moon Cave, Frank Moon garnered considerable publicity and displayed early signs of his promotional adroitness when his tale of discovery was reported in the local press,

'Moon secured a rope, and went down into the water. The stream was 4 feet deep. He scrambled through narrow low passages, up to his neck in water, with his head almost touching the roof. Stalactites and stalagmites, absolutely perfect, were found in immense chambers and low passages.

Jane Moon 1831 – 1981, The Author, Buchan, 1981, for Moon family history; Trudy Sady, 'Buchan Mungie: Place of Holes – Discovery and Exploration of the Buchan Caves', Bachelor of Education (Gippsland History) essay, Monash University, 1988; and Elery Hamilton-Smith, 'Historical Notes on Buchan and Buchan Caves', Notes edited by Peter Ackroyd from talk given to the Victorian Speleological Association Inc., 7 October 1987, p.2, for early Frank Moon oral history; Adams, *The Tambo Shire*, p. 245.

¹¹ This cave was not connected in any way with Moon's Cave, which was located in Moon's Paddock at Murrindal River. Refer: Stirling Report, p. 67, for Moon's Cave.

Moon caught mountain trout of a whitish colour with large sightless eyes'.¹²

Following the eponymous naming of this cave, a fortuitous series of events combined to focus government attention on the caves and in 1906 the Department of Lands and Survey employed Frank Moon on a temporary salary of \$11 13s 4d a month as the first Government appointed 'Caretaker of the Buchan caves'. On the day that Moon announced his discovery he arranged for John Flynn (GHJ 26-19), who was then resident in Buchan as a Home Missionary, to photograph the Moon Cave and they did so that night. Flynn subsequently travelled to Orbost and showed lantern slides of the cave to the Orbost Railway League. An active supporter of the league was Orbost resident and MLA for East Gippsland, James Cameron and he was keen to see East Gippsland, opened-up to commerce and trade. He was also already familiar with the geological opportunities of the Buchan district through his involvement in marble extraction at Buchan South and mining investment at Nowa Nowa. Cameron's immediate predecessor as MLA for East Gippsland was former Omeo miner and Minister for Mines, Henry Foster, who more than once was intransigent in the face of requests to promote exploration of the Buchan caves. In contrast Cameron was a keen supporter. Following his lantern slide show at Orbost, Flynn was elected as the Buchan Railway League delegate and included in an East Gippsland Railway League deputation to Melbourne on 3 October 1906, where he took the opportunity of discussing the value of the Buchan caves as a tourist attraction with the Premier of Victoria, Sir Thomas Bent. Flynn's advocacy was opportune, as the Bent government was keen to promote Victoria as a tourist attraction and

¹² Sady, 'Buckan Mungie', p.13, for pottering around; Hamilton-Smith, 'Historical Notes', pp. 1-2, for O'Rourke's Cave & Moon Cave; Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves Collection), Report by Lands Department District Surveyor, dated 15 May 1907, for Moon Cave closure; Richard Aitken Pty Ltd, 'Buchan Caves Reserve Heritage Action Plan', The Author, South Yarra, 2004, p. 9, for Moon Cave assessment; *Bairnsdale Advertiser*, 6 October 1906; and *Snony River Mail*, 29 September 1906, for press reports.

just that year had established the first Victorian Government Tourist Bureau. During October 1906 Bent toured East Gippsland, including the Buchan caves, and on his return to Melbourne he gave a public lantern slide lecture to 2,000 people at the Melbourne Town Hall, during which he waxed lyrical about the Buchan caves, describing them as 'dazzling'. A Railway League publication of the period, illustrated with John Flynn's photographs, opined, 'This district will at some future date be known as the wonderland of Victoria'.¹³

In the midst of all this cave-related activity Albert Kitson returned to Buchan and spent two weeks with Frank Moon and others, undertaking survey work in furtherance of the reports that he had completed in 1900. The main report of his 1906 visit he penned aboard the R.M.S. *Oruba*, somewhere in the Indian Ocean, off the Western Australian coast, destined for Southern Nigeria: and the report 'had to be written from memory', as in the hurry of his departure from Melbourne he left his Buchan field notebook behind in Australia. Despite this haste Kitson lost nothing of his passion for caves and East Gippsland and proved a good friend to Frank Moon. He wrote of the grandeur of the Buchan and

¹³ *Victoria Government Gazette*, 31 January 1907, p. 723, for employment of Moon as caretaker; Sady, 'Buckan Mungie', p. 16, for Moon Cave photographing; Robert Haldane, 'Photo Folio – John Flynn at Buchan', *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, No. 26, 2002, p. 20, for John Flynn; W. Scott McPheat, *John Flynn Apostle to the Inland*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1963, p. 37, for Railway League delegation; *ADB*, Vol. 7, 'James Cameron (1846-1922)' pp. 536-7; *ADB*, Vol. 3, 'Sir Thomas Bent (1838-1909)' pp.144-6; www.parl.vic.gov.au/re-member/biogresearch.cfm (searched 07 August 2006), for Henry Foster; Harvey, et al, 'Buchan And Its Caves', p. 99, for Foster's intransigence; *Snony River Mail*, 29 September 1906, 6 October 1906, 3 November 1906 and 10 November 1906, for Flynn's election, delegation and Bent tour; Susan Priestley, *The Victorians: Making Their Mark*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, McMahons Point, 1984, p. 224, for Tourist Bureau; Orbost and East Gippsland Railway League, *Railway Extension Through East Gippsland*, Atlas Press, Melbourne, 1908, p. 18.

Snowy River country and of the 'delightful uncertainty about caves that leads to the charm of cave exploration, for there is absolutely no end to such work' He appended a draft set of regulations for the management of caves in Buchan and endorsed 'Mr. Moon' as the person who 'will have his time taken up quite fully in opening up and looking after the caves in the neighbourhood of Buchan'¹⁴

In December 1906 Frank Moon discovered a cave near the Spring Creek Cave and named it the Kitson Cave after Albert Kitson, who was knighted in 1927 and also had a fossil mollusc, a fossil eucalypt and a living eucalypt named after him. Moon began conducting tours through this cave almost immediately and its formations were photographed extensively by John Flynn, who sold his photographs for publication in newspapers, reproduced them as postcards and used them in lantern slide lectures¹⁵

The exploratory work of Moon and others was given impetus of a different sort when noted palaeontologist Thomas Sergeant Hall visited Buchan in December 1906, 'to inquire into the truth of statements in the newspapers as to the presence of mammalian bones in the floors of the caves'. Despite the previous damage and souveniring of fossils in the Buchan caves, Hall was able to build on the earlier work of Stirling and his visit resulted in an important collection of bones for the National Museum.¹⁶

Although Frank Moon was clearly not the first person to discover the Buchan caves, he was instrumental in promoting both the Moon and Kitson Caves and continued thereafter working assiduously to locate and develop new

caves in Buchan. On 18 March 1907 his interest was rewarded when he opened-up a small hole on a hillside near the Spring Creek Cave and discovered a significant new cave that far excelled 'in extent and beauty, all others yet discovered in the district'. Years later Moon ebulliently described how he made this discovery:

'It was a small depression on the ground ... it was blocked with huge rocks and I blew them open with explosives, put a crowbar across and fifty feet of rope and skid down and ultimately got into where the fall of rock is in the Fairy cave, where the tunnel goes through today. I returned from the fall of rock and came out as quickly as I could and came over the hill to the township to inform someone what I had found. The most wonderful cave that's ever been discovered ... I was very excited you know'.¹⁷

He named it the Fairy Cave and two days later wrote to the Secretary of the Lands Department, enthusiastically informing him of his discovery:

'I have the greatest pleasure in announcing to you in writing my discovery of the 18th

The only surface indication of this Cave was a hole that you could put your fist in.

By breaking it away large enough to admit my body I lowered myself down a distance of 40 ft into an immense cavern. I have explored its passages for fully $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile and must say that it is beyond all my expectations. All I can say is that it is amazingly beautiful. In fact one could not explain its grandeur to anyone. I am allowing Mr. Bulmer to take some views of it and will forward some as soon as possible. I feel convinced now that I have Jenolans rival'.¹⁸

¹⁴Sady, 'Buckan Mungie', p. 17, for excerpt of Frank Moon interview and relationship with Kitson; Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves Collection), Report to the Secretary for Mines by A. E. Kitson, 25 November 1906; *ADB*, Vol. 9, 'Sir Albert Kitson (1868-1937)', pp. 617-8.

¹⁵ *ADB*, Vol. 9, p. 618, for Kitson; Hamilton-Smith, 'Historical Notes', p. 2, for Kitson Cave; Robert Haldane, 'Photo Folio', p. 20, for John Flynn.

¹⁶ J.H. Harvey, et al, 'Buchan And Its caves', p. 98; *ADB*, Vol. 9, 'Thomas Sergeant Hall (1858-1915)', pp. 166-7; Stirling Report, p. 68.

¹⁷ Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves Collection). Copy of A.E. Kitson correspondence, 13 May 1907, for cave description; Sady, 'Buckan Mungie', p. 18, for Moon's account of Fairy Cave discovery.

¹⁸ Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves Collection). Copy of letter from F.H.A. Moon to The Secretary Lands Department, 20 March 1907.

Frank Moon did not have personal knowledge of the famed caves at Jenolan in New South Wales but he was keen to see the caves at Buchan rival their renowned status as a tourist attraction and within days he began guiding parties on tours through 'his' Fairy Cave: by April more than one hundred visitors had been shown through the cave.¹⁹

The 'Mr. Bulmer' referred to in Moon's letter was Gippsland photographer Howard Decimus Bulmer, who was in the early stages of a career in photography that was to last for almost fifty years. His photographs of the Fairy and other Buchan caves were an important element in their publicity and further development. John Flynn had moved from Buchan back to Melbourne on 4 January 1907 and was not about to assist Moon with his photographic promotion of the Fairy Cave. Although Flynn did return to Buchan in 1908 on leave, to deliver a lantern slide lecture on the Snowy River and photographed some Fairy Cave formations during that visit. Other photographers who figured in the early promotion of the Buchan caves were Buchan South Postmaster, James Henry Macdougall, who operated Walden Studios from Buchan and F. Verrell Heath. In 1907 Heath published his illustrated work *Views of the Buchan Caves and Pyramids*, which included photographs of Frank Moon and the Spring Creek, Kitson and Moon caves. Because its release on 26 March almost coincided with the discovery of the Fairy Cave, Heath missed the opportunity to include the Fairy Cave in the first impression of his booklet²⁰

¹⁹ Peter Ackroyd & Elery Hamilton-Smith, 'An Idyllic Setting: the Buchan Caves Reserve', *Gippsland Heritage Journal*, No. 25, 2001, p. 18, for no knowledge of Jenolan.

²⁰ Squires, *Gippsland in Focus*, p. 6, for Bulmer, p. 39, for Heath, pp. 52-3, for Macdougall; Haldane, 'Photo-Folio – John Flynn', p. 20, for Flynn's return to Melbourne; McPheat, *Apostle to the Inland*, p. 240, for Flynn's 1908 visit; <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an24586889> and [pic-an24353401](http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an24353401) (searched 29 July 2006), for Flynn's Fairy Cave images of 'Shawls' and 'The Crystal Grotto'; F. Verrell Heath, *Views of the Buchan Caves and Pyramids*, T. C. Lothian, Melbourne, 1907.

Lands Department District Surveyor, William Thorn, visited the Buchan caves in April 1907, which is when the first known map of the Fairy Cave was drawn, including the naming of some cave formations after characters in William Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'Oberon's Throne' (Oberon was King of the Fairies) and 'Titania's Bower' (Titania was Queen of the Fairies), were two of these. Mindful of the damage that visitors had already done to other caves in Buchan, Thorn moved quickly to preserve the finely decorated Fairy Cave and recommended on 15 May 1907 that the cave 'be absolutely closed until the formations have been protected' adding that Frank Moon was 'an enthusiastic and intrepid explorer' and 'an experienced and intelligent miner' but that he required assistance 'to erect railings and netting'. It was further recommended that 'an experienced man be obtained from New South Wales' for this task. The Fairy Cave was closed almost immediately and Frederick John Wilson, a former caretaker of the Jenolan Caves in New South Wales, was appointed to develop the Fairy Cave for tourism in accordance with what was then accepted as best caves management practice. Wilson has been described as 'a very shy man ... a very reticent and retiring man' but also as 'a visionary with a great sensitivity to the natural world'. Assisted by Frank Moon and others, he established pathways and handrails in the Fairy Cave and it was re-opened to tourists on 2 December 1907. Using the one entrance-exit point Moon and Wilson were then able to guide tourists to the rock fall known as 'Titania's Bower'. On 17 March 1908 Sir Reginald Talbot, the Governor of Victoria, visited and officially opened the Fairy Cave and he and his party were served refreshments in a chamber of Wilson's Cave, that was set with a picnic table and dubbed Picnic Hall.²¹

²¹ Ackroyd & Hamilton-Smith, 'An Idyllic Setting', pp. 18-19; Sady, p. 19, incorrectly cites Titania's Bower as Titania's Bath: refer to Harvey, et al, 'Buchan And Its Caves', for Fairy Cave Map; Hamilton-Smith, 'Community Consultation notes', pp. 2-3, and Elery Hamilton-Smith, 'Buchan Caves Memorabilia: An exhibition at the Museum of Victoria 3rd – 8th June 2004' p. 9, for description of Wilson; Harvey, et al, 'Buchan And Its Caves', pp. 101-3, for report on Thorn's visit; Parks Victoria

Always an intrepid explorer, the full extent of Frank Moon's caves explorations will probably never be known but another discovery in which he played a significant role occurred in November 1910, when, together with Frederick Wilson and local police Constable Hercules Brown, he explored beyond the surveyed limits of Fairy Cave and discovered what today is known as Royal Cave. Recently arrived in Buchan, Brown had served during the Boer War as one of 'Kitchener's Fighting Scouts' but despite that robust background he found life underground with Wilson and Moon tough going. On the day of their initial discovery they spent nine hours underground in mud and perilous conditions and returned on the following two days to undertake further work. Although Wilson instigated this exploration, when at one point their progress was impeded, it was, according to Brown, the younger and more athletic Frank Moon who led the way,

'it looked as if our advance had become completely blocked when Mr. Moon, who had been ferreting around, discovered a hole under a pile of rocks, and promptly dived through the opening and dropped about eight feet below into the underground creek we had been following. Mr. Wilson and I followed, and found with joy that we had negotiated the fall and were standing in a roomy rockbound chamber'.²²

Following this discovery Wilson supervised the installation of iron railings and wire netting in a manner similar to his work at the Jenolan Caves and in 1913 an artificial entrance was also constructed, enabling Royal Cave to be opened for public tours. Wilson's design and installation of the protective netting in Royal Cave are amongst the finest examples of this type of work in the world. In March 1915

(Buchan Caves Collection), Report by Lands Department District Surveyor, dated 15 May 1907; Adams, *The Tambo Shire*, p. 246, for Governor's visit.

²² Hercules Brown, 'Cave Hunting – A Wonderful Discovery', *The Police Journal*, Monday 2 February 1920, pp. 5-6; Correspondence from Victoria Police Museum to the author, 26 July 2006, for Brown's military and police service history.

Wilson decided to exhaust the known boundaries of Royal Cave and over a period of days, in company with caves employee William H. Bonwick, he followed leads and 'got into a new cave' with 'one very fine chamber of rich formation' and formed the view that 'It would be very easy to improve' for display as a tourist cave. In succeeding weeks Frank Moon helped Wilson and Bonwick to take soundings and complete their survey of the 'new cave' which was named Federal Cave. Over a period of years Wilson and Moon were assisted with much of the heavy 'hammer and chisel' work in the caves by William Bonwick, William Foster and Francis Hansford.²³

Frank Moon worked with Wilson to install iron railings and wire netting in Federal Cave but he was not about in 1917 to witness its public opening. On 4 May 1916, Moon, then aged thirty-five and the married father of three young girls, enlisted in the A.I.F. 38th Battalion and embarked aboard HMAT *Themistocles* bound for war in Europe. He was wounded once and served at Messines, Ypres, Passchendaele and on the Somme but even the turmoil of military service overseas did not dim his abiding interest in caving. Whilst en route to Europe his troopship docked at Cape Town and there he had his name and 'Buchan Caves' written on his hat: drawing the interest of 'plenty of men [who] came up to me to have a talk as they had been through the Caves'. In August 1916 he wrote to his three daughters,

'To My Dear Daughters ... Tell mum to take great care of all my books + my trees I imagine I can see the Cootamundra wattle all in bloom up the Cave avenue

Dad will find some new caves when he comes back I will have a look at the caves in England + see if they are as good as our Fairy Caves ... Tell dad all the news when you write let me know how Cave Queen + Goddess [sic] are looking + how many cows you milk + tell me if there are many people visiting the Caves at present'.

²³ Parks Victoria (Buchan Caves Collection), Correspondence from F.H. Wilson to The Secretary for Lands, 27 March 1915, for Federal Cave discovery; 29 April 1915, for Moon taking soundings; Heritage Action Plan, p. 9, for Federal Cave infrastructure; Swift, 'This Man Spent 50 Years Underground', p. 3.

When serving on the front he often sent his best wishes to 'Mr Wilson' and his letters home frequently mentioned 'the caves', enthusing in 1918 that it 'was a record year to the Caves'. Buchan and its caves was a barometer by which Moon measured his time overseas and early in 1917 he 'earnestly hoped to be showing visitors through the caves in 1917' During his idle moments at war Moon wrote poetry and one of his longer poems included the stanza:

'Some day the call of peace will come and I will wander back;

To walk with you and talk with you along the old Cave Track'.²⁴

Moon returned safely to Australia in April 1919, resuming his position of caretaker at the Buchan caves. While Moon was away Frederick Wilson lived with the Moon family and then aged in his sixties and too old for battles afar, he laboured assiduously in Buchan with the work of preserving and promoting the caves. Wilson continued as Supervisor of the Buchan caves until his retirement, aged sixty-seven years on 31 December 1921, when he was succeeded by Frank Moon.²⁵

Moon was passionate about the Buchan caves and for him it wasn't just a matter of work but a way of life. Together with his wife Sabina (nee Carragher) and three daughters he resided in a house known as 'Cave House' within the Buchan Caves Reserve. Sabina Moon initially sold cave tickets from the sitting room of the house and their daughter Queenie 'used to have to go round with a case strapped to her neck selling post cards of the caves'. His eldest daughter, born in 1908, he named Fairy after the Fairy Cave and when she married Buchan cave guide Francis James Hansford on 14 April 1930, the wedding ceremony was conducted by

²⁴ www.awm.gov.au, searched 19 July 2006, for Frank Moon's military service; Correspondence from Brian Hansford to the author, 11 August 2006, for Cape Town anecdote; Moon Family Papers held by Craig Woodgate, Buchan, for Moon's war service letters and poems, including letter to his daughters, 9 August 1916.

²⁵ Ackroyd & Hamilton Smith, 'An Idyllic Setting', p. 19, for Wilson retirement and Moon appointment.

Reverend Albert Ethelbert Clark from Bruthen, in the presence of approximately fifty guests, inside the Fairy Cave in the *King's Chamber*, in front of what has since been known as the *Crystal Altar*. Frank Moon sought special permission from the Committee of Management for this ceremony and to this day it is the only wedding to have been performed in the Buchan caves. In accordance with her father's wishes, Fairy later named her first-born son Cave.²⁶ One of Frank Moon's abiding interests away from the caves was the owning and training of racehorses but even in that venture he was careful to retain a cave connection and his horses included Royal Cave, Cave Girl, Cave King and Cave Queen.²⁷

Frank Moon worked at the Buchan Caves for thirty-four years, retiring at the age of sixty in 1940. In retirement he remained in Buchan, living at his home 'Hill View' and dividing his time between fossicking for gold and working on fire watch towers. In 1954 his contribution to caving in Buchan was honoured by the dedication of a memorial plaque at the entrance to the Fairy Cave and within the Cave Reserve there is a 'Moon Hill Walk' and the 'Frank Moon Memorial Children's Playground'. In 2001 his likeness formed part of the national *Peoplescape* on the grassed slopes of Parliament House in Canberra.²⁸

There has long been discussion about who discovered the Buchan caves and precisely when and how that occurred. Clearly they have always been part of Indigenous Australia, spanning an evolution of millions of years preceding European settlement in the 1830s.

Debate still surrounds the dawning of this European discovery, with its attendant damage and despoliation but the role of Frank Moon in discovering and promoting the Fairy Cave is

²⁶ Mackieson, *A Brief History of the Family*; Kent Henderson & Marise de Quadros, *The Buchan & Murrindal Caves*, Henderson de Quadros Publications, Williamstown, 1993, p. 9; Interview with Woodgate Family, 18 June 2006; Sady, 'Buckan Mungie', Transcript of interview with Queenie Woodgate, n.d.

²⁷ Idem.

²⁸ Ibid; Michael McKernan, *The Peoplescape Celebrating Australians*, Hardie Grant Books, South Yarra, 2002, p.145.

beyond dispute and the Buchan caves stand today in part as a monument to him and the efforts of others like James Stirling, Albert Kitson and Frederick Wilson, who saw the beauty and potential of these caves as Nature's gift to natural science, exploration and tourism in East Gippsland. Frank Moon died, aged eighty-six years, on 27 April 1967 and is buried in the Buchan cemetery. During his funeral service the Reverend Frank Lowe spoke about Moon's affinity with Buchan and its caves and observed, 'When one thinks of Buchan one also thinks of Frank Moon ... he was a true pioneer helping to lay the foundation of the very lovely Caves Reserve and it is a lasting tribute to his name'. In 2003, in words that might well serve as an epitaph for Frank Moon, noted speleologist Elery Hamilton-Smith observed,

'there is no question that Frank was the man who put Buchan on the map as a tourist site. He was such a salesman and such an enthusiast that he convinced the people of Victoria that this was the most wondrous discovery. You only need to look at the newspapers at that time to see what a sensation it was and that was very much due to Frank's talent for selling people about his enthusiasm. So he played a very important part and must never be forgotten'²⁹

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²⁹Certificate of Death No. 9907/67 for Francis Herbert Arthur Moon; Funeral service notes of Reverend Frank Lowe, 29 April 1967; Elery Hamilton-Smith, Community Consultation Presentation re Heritage Action Plan for Buchan Caves, 20 May 2003, pp. 1-2.