

# CAVE MANAGEMENT: Genghis Khan Cave Tasmania

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## Abstract

Genghis Khan Cave is in the Mole Creek Karst National Park, managed by Parks & Wildlife Service (PWS). Karstcare is a group of volunteers who contribute to cave management in Tasmania, with over 4,000 hours of work contributed since its inception. This paper outlines a recently completed project to enable cavers to visit this cave with minimal impact.

## Introduction

KarstCare is an environmental group that has been operating in Tasmania since October 2000. We are part of a large volunteer group called Wildcare which was set up to work in Parks and reserves assisting PWS with management. Some groups are into weed eradication, some water or animal monitoring, however KarstCare is a bit unique; our workplace is predominantly underground. Sometimes our workplace may be 2 hours or more into a cave. As of May 2023 we have contributed over 4,200 hours to karst management that is not counting planning, meetings and travelling

Genghis Khan Cave is in the Mole Creek Karst National Park, which is a collection of several disjointed parcels of land.

## Tasmania PWS Processes

As a process of managing caves in Tasmania PWS have an on-going process of consulting with cavers to determine what areas of a cave can be visited and by whom. PWS have involved cavers in producing digital maps of many of the Mole Creek Caves, giving them some idea of what they are actually managing. This results in a "Cave Access Zoning" statement for each cave examined. Genghis Khan Cave is predominantly zoned "Limited Access Cave," requiring a PWS issued permit to Australian Speleological Federation (ASF) clubs or equivalent. Three sections of this cave were determined to be too delicate to enter, so were zoned "Special Management," requiring a Government Ministerial approval before PWS can issue a permit access. Two of these areas can be 'viewed' from string lined barriers with explanation signage.

Contributing to this zoning process Alan Jackson produced a new digital map, with field work assistance from several cavers. Genghis Khan Cave is

a particularly popular cave for cavers visiting Mole Creek, quite renowned for its anthodites; one of the best displays in Australia.

Genghis Khan Cave is generically part of the Kubla Khan Cave system; however no connection has been found.

## Upgrading In-Cave Management

Of concern to many cavers was the general lack of in-cave management of this cave. Once a permit is granted and key for the gate obtained, cavers could wander around most of the cave (except the Special Management sections) with no real guidance as to where to walk. This has resulted in mud tracking over many surfaces of the cave.

Northern Caverneers members Janice March and Dave Wools-Cobb submitted a proposal to PWS for a practical project to minimise this mud tracking in the regularly visited areas of this cave, however a major obstacle to progressing this was the availability of water to clean the route.

On an initial visit in consulting with Karst Officer Rolan Eberhard a route was determined, and string line positioning commenced. Measurements were taken of areas unable to be cleaned for future placement of plastic tube matting and two boot wash bins with brushes positioned. Reflectors about 10-12m apart were placed up a sloping flat slab as it was decided these were more practical than string line. The route in-effect was counter-clockwise returning in a loop to a junction with the route earlier descended. Two old carbide dumps were also cleaned up: these dating decades back to the use of carbide lamps and less environmental-aware attitudes.

PWS fire crew were engaged to provide water in a 500l collar dam positioned immediately outside the entrance to the cave as well as a further 500l at the Kubla Khan Cave entrance for another project. This involved carrying up the collapsed collar dam, then rolling out sufficient fire hose to enable water to be pumped several hundred metres from a vehicle access track up into the dam. We were not present during this event; however greatly appreciate that it would have been a considerable effort.

On a subsequent working bee cleaning of the route was commenced. This involved positioning about 120m of 12mm poly pipe from the collar dam and

down into the cave with frequent “T” joiners enabling two teams to clean at the one time. Each junction was clamped on both sides of the joiner, with frequent taps positioned to control water flow. Cleaning involved wetting, then scrubbing with brushes and hosing again; a scrub/spray/scrub technique. Any area that drained towards flowstone rather than down into the rockfall substrate was filtered with towel dams. This cleaning is slow arduous work, and the teams end up extremely wet themselves. On this first trip tube matting was placed in two areas with another area measured for future matting placement. Unfortunately with two teams working at once, our water did not last long enough to complete cleaning.

The Kubla Khan Cave project cleaning Pitch 1 & 2 only used about 250l of water, so we positioned 20m of fire hose and about 180m of poly pipe from this collar dam down to the Genghis Khan Cave entrance.

On the subsequent working bee the pressure of an approximately 70m head of water was incredible, requiring clamps at every poly pipe junction, however the ability to shift mud from rock surfaces was amazing. Unfortunately, we again ran out of water before completing the cleaning.

Time was spent positioning flat rocks over a particularly muddy area in preparation for plastic matting cover and more flat rocks on some muddy natural steps on a climb, attempting to lessen mud picked up by boots in the future.

There was considerable delay before the PWS fire crew could provide more water, but as soon as this was available, we had a final working bee to complete the cleaning. Fortunately, the top boot wash bin is sitting under a regular drip line, so we filled the lower bin and left several filled water bladders for future use. More tube matting was positioned over a

particularly bad muddy section giving access to a viewing area that is very photogenic. With water remaining, some of the lower areas were re-cleaned and a second viewing area provided, within string line barriers.

Updates were submitted for the PWS “Note sheet” for visitors to Genghis Khan Cave. Our delineated route gives good access to most of the cave with minimal impact. There are two other areas of the cave that are particularly beautiful however do not involve much mud, so hopefully should remain in good condition.

### **Conclusion**

In all, about 300m of poly pipe was involved, 1250 litres of water and about 200m of string line and 9m of plastic matting. The total cost of infrastructure left in the cave would only be about \$250.

This series of working bees demonstrates that apart from considerable labour, a low budget project can achieve a great deal. A total of 135hrs by Karstcare volunteers were contributed plus PWS fire team efforts in providing water. The cave can be visited well into the future with minimal impact.

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Volunteers:

Northern Caverneers: Cathie Plowman, David Butler, Steve Jacobs, Paul Van Nynanten, Renée Larcher, Janice March, Eleanor March, Bob Pennington, Jeremy Douglas-Bill

Mole Creek Caving Club: Claire Capper

Savage River Caving Club: Paul Darby

PWS staff: Chris McMonagle, Rolan Eberhard, and the PWS fire-crew.