

# **Karst on Pungalina Station, Northern Territory**

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VSA has now conducted two very productive trips to explore the caves and karst on Pungalina Station, NT. Pungalina Station is situated close to the Gulf of Carpentaria on the Calvert River and operates high quality safari tours. VSA became aware of caves from cave photographs in promotional material for these safaris. Enquiries led to organising an expedition during June 2005 to explore and study the karst.

The caves are in the Pre-Cambrian Karns Creek Dolomite (~ 1.3 billion years old) that contains fossil stromatolites. To date we have discovered and explored over 25 caves and features.

Totem Pole Cave (PUN-7) was known to the owners and when surveyed turned out to be over 1 kilometre in length and to contain a maternity colony of ghost bats. Other discoveries followed such as Ballroom Cave (PUN-11), an extensive, well decorated multi-entrance cave with a large population of orange horseshoe bats. The follow-up trip in June 2006 was nearly cancelled because of flooding during the wet season and wet conditions constrained extensive exploration, but resulted in more detailed exploration near Totem Pole Cave. Careful track-marking was done in both Ballroom Cave and Totem Pole Cave to constrain the effects of small tourist parties and to avoid bat roost areas. A lot of biological collecting was undertaken as well as some bat bone collecting to confirm the identity of the bats.

VSA is planning further trips to the area to examine the numerous possibilities, evident from aerial reconnaissance