

The history and future of Wyanbene Cave or “A Wyanbene Carol” with apologies to Charles Dickens

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Introduction

The Wyanbene Cave system has been used extensively since its discovery in the mid-1880's by caving club members, speleologists, members of the Scout movement, other youth groups and for Emergency Service rescue training. A great deal of intentional damage has been noticed in the tourist section and unintentional damage has been done to the cave beyond the locked gate, since the extension to the end of the cave was found over 50 years ago. Little has been done to educate users or to restrict access to paths in well decorated areas or to rehabilitate the cave. Cave managers have restricted access by the use of a gate since 1986 and a permit system presently exists and it is intend to continue the permit process in the future in a more restrictive manner. In October 2011, members of Canberra Speleological Society and Illawarra Speleological Society encouraged the idea of a cleaning project to enable extra trips into the cave under the revised permit system implemented by the local office of NPWS to assist in the rehabilitation and education of users.

This paper briefly examines the history of use of Wyanbene cave, the present Management plan in regard to access and the future cave cleaning program.

Location

Wyanbene Cave is located 70 kilometres south east of Canberra, 250 kilometres south west of Sydney and 40 kilometres south of Braidwood in the Southern Tablelands of NSW. The cave is within the Deua National Park of South East NSW



and the Big Hole is nearby. These short distances make it an accessible location for cavers to visit the cave.

History of use by speleos and other cavers

During the mining of silver near the cave, the water from the cave was used to supply water to the activity. (Anon 1889)

Trickett (1899) reported that an iron gate and ladders were installed at the entrance for the protection of the cave. The gate and ladders cost 27 pound 12 shillings and 7 pence in 1889.

These ladders are still used today to enable tourists and cavers to reach the “Bat Chamber” and are in good condition.

In the late 1890's to early 20th Century the entrance Stream way and “Tourist Section” were open to the public, and electric lights used in the late 1920's to show tourists around the cave.

Dew and Pemble (1957) identify numerous bats and 2 spider species in the Main Cave.

A 1966 description of the cave noted that most of the formations were a dirty brown colour along the stream way passage from the Keyhole into the cave. During May, Garrington (1966) notes that a ladder at the entrance and just through



Picnic at Wyanbene Caves late 1920s

This is a photograph of a picnic at Wyanbene Caves. The day was organised by A generator was organised to put electric light through the caves. Jim Dempsey assisted, by following behind the crowd and putting out lights as they moved forward to provide more light in the front.



FIGURE 1 Tony Baxter (Green Helmet) NPWS Manager Deua Region on inspection tour of Tourist ladders in Wyanbene Cave February 2012



FIGURE 2 Ian Chalson at Wyanbene Entrance gate.
Photo Bob Kershaw, March 1978

the keyhole had been removed and that a lot of damage in the Cleopatra's Bath area had occurred. His party also named Diarrhoea Pit. Halbert (1966) reported that his party found surveyed and named Chamber Pot and found a way to Frustration Lake and that Perkins swam the lake trying to find an exit, albeit unsuccessfully.

Dean (1967) and other members of MSS took radio communication gear, portable gas stove and meteorological equipment to measure the weather at the keyhole.

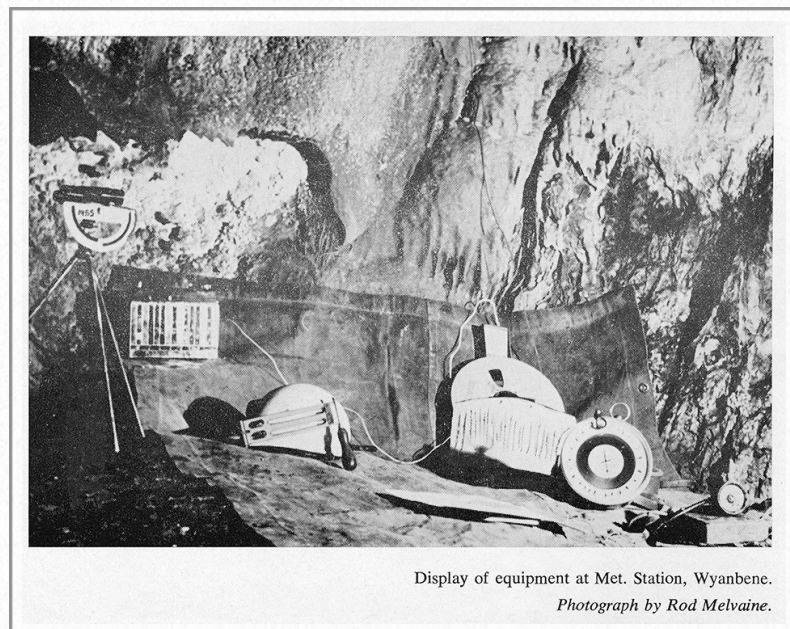


FIGURE 3 MSS weather station set up

Booth (1967) noted that his party found many flash bulbs, fruit skins, paper and large blobs floating on the water surface and on rocks.

A great deal of exploration occurred in the cave in the 1960's to find where the cave was in relation to the surface and if extensions could be found. But alas no extensions were found.

Call (1970) noted that NUCC used balloons filled with Hydrogen to measure the Gunbarrel aven at 346 feet.

During the 70s and 80s many parties entered the cave on the same weekend and as many as 7 at one time were reported. Often groups used each other's gear and the public often wandered in using caving clubs' equipment. At one time Halbert (1982) stated that there were 6 ladders hanging down the pitch after the keyhole.

A radio direction finding activity in 1970 by Wellings and ISS members was undertaken to find the location of the Gunbarrel aven in relation to the surface to see if there was any surface entrance to the cave near this point.

In the early 70s NUCC led by John Brush completed an exacting survey of the cave and produced a map that is used as a basis for the 2012 cleaning survey.

Pavey (1972) mentioned that Cleopatra's Bath was suffering from the constant use by cavers.

Hurst (1973) led a diving Recon party with no gear into Frustration Lake. They returned a few months later with gear but found no continuation.

1973 onwards saw the invasion of ISS members with a helium balloon exercise to take photographs of the Gunbarrel Aven and roof. In 1975 they confirm the height as 367 feet and took

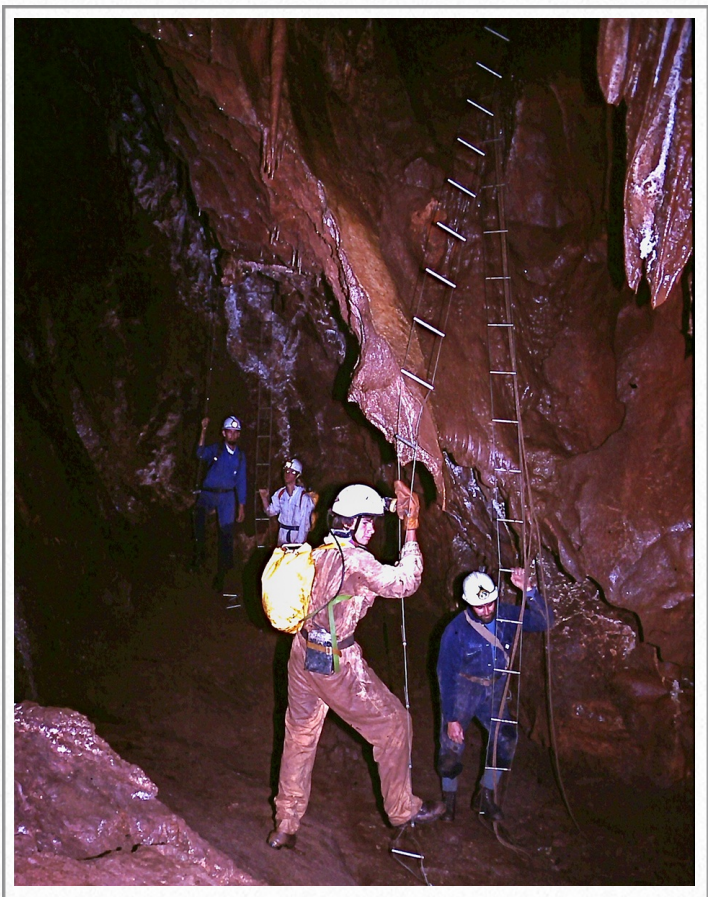


FIGURE 4 *Ladders below Keyhole Pitch in Wyanbene Cave.
Photograph by Ross Ellis (Sydney Speleological Society)
January 1982*



FIGURE 5 *Note the shawl to the left.
Photo by Lloyd Robinson circa 1962*



FIGURE 6 *Note the shawl is broken.*



FIGURE 7 *Entering the Cleopatra's Bath area with
muddy clothes and boots.*

Photo by Deborah Johnston

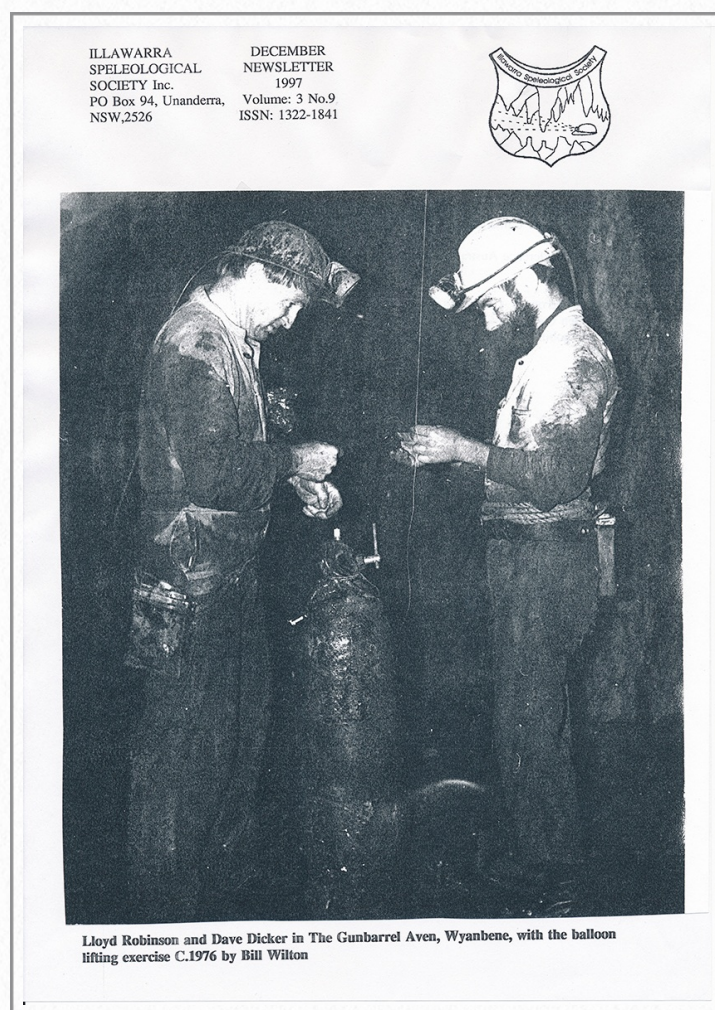


FIGURE 8 *Hydrogen filling of cleaning balloons
by ISS*

Cavers go to good areas after the mud sections and do not remove muddy gear or boots. The photos on this page depict some activities undertaken in the cave. You can think of the resulting damage to the cave.

many photographs. In April of that year Wilton (1975) described another RDF attempt and cairns being constructed on the surface to locate underground positions. In 1976 ISS again sent balloons aloft in the Gunbarrel noticing a severe cross current 200 ft above the bottom of the aven.

Warild (1977) reported that he spent several hours attempting to climb the Gunbarrel Aven but had to give up at the 63m height as he could climb no further.

Coggan (1974) reported that NUCC conducted a trip for a submission for a gate for the cave so that some degree of protection can be afforded to the cave.

Various filming activities took place in the cave during 1978 and 1979 by ISS and WIN TV.

Davey (1978) wrote a submission to the NSW Under Secretary of Mines objecting to the inclusion of the karst and caves in a proposed exploration licence.

Dicker (1979) reports that several strain gauges were installed in the cave to measure rock movement. These have proved over the years that little movement has taken place.

A gate was installed in 1986 at the keyhole but with limited success and in 1987 a new gate was installed but had been removed from the wall in 1995 (Rowling ~ 1995)

During 2003, 2005 major cave rescue exercises are conducted in the cave and many rescue service personnel are involved.

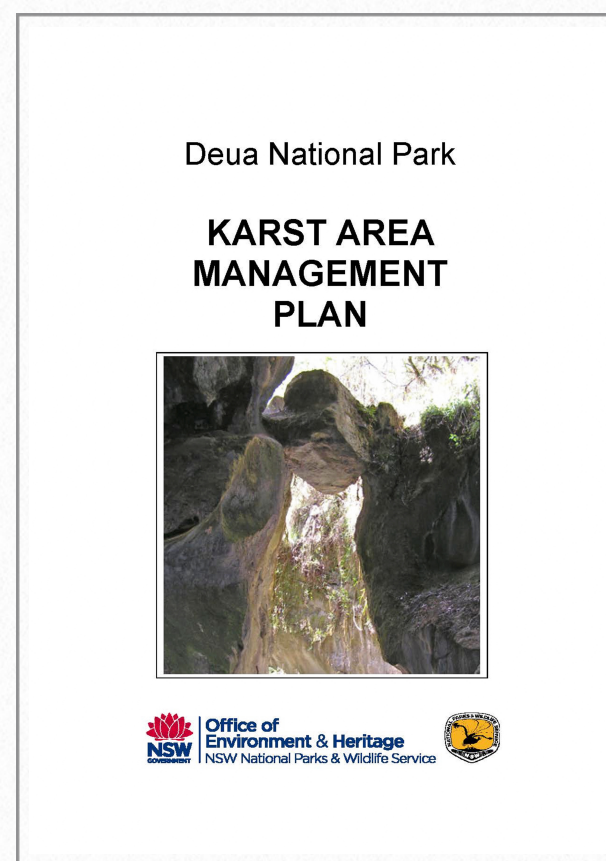
Karst Area Management Plan

In June 2003 Kershaw (pers Comm) suggested to author of Far South Coast Parks Management Plan meeting that there should be a management plan for the caves within the Deua Park.

Coogan and Brush take NPWS personnel who will be drafting the karst plan into Wyanbene Cave during 2004 for a first-hand experience of the cave. They later meet with members from ISS in Canberra for a meeting regarding the karst plan.

The staff of the Far South Coast NPWS region produced a draft Karst Area Management Plan but then the Karst and Geodiversity Unit in Oberon rewrote the draft and presented it to the Director for signature. But it was not presented to ISS or CSS to comment upon before signature. There were many glaring errors and restrictions in the Appendix 4 of the plan.

At a meeting in November 2011, as a method of overcoming the 6 trips per annum in Wyanbene Cave, Brush and Kershaw



presented a cave cleaning proposal to the Manager of the South coast or Deua National Park.

Please contact John Brush (johnbrush@ozemail.com.au) or Bob Kershaw (rkershaw@ozemail.com.au) for electronic copies of the Deua KAMP.

The Future - Cave cleaning project.

The Cave cleaning and rehabilitation project will:

- Provide education to all cave users (not just speleo societies) to take care of karst environments and encourage low impact caving (not just here but within all caves in NSW).
- Increase good name of speleological societies in the SE of NSW with NPWS and with non-speleological Society cave users
- Encourage all members especially youth and new members in CSS and ISS to take care of karst environments
- Enable, support and encourage other cave users (non-speleological societies) to be involved in Karst care
- Provide a karst care project example that will enable and encourage other Australian Speleological Societies to undertake similar projects within caves in their areas and to use the learning from this project within their own projects.
- Enable NPWS managers in other parts of NSW to see what could be done with caves in their area and that a good relationship can and does exist with the speleological organisations



FIGURE 10 *Cleaning in the entrance streamway*
Photo Bob Kershaw



FIGURE 11 *Marj Coggan Cleaning in Wyanbene Cave*
Photo by John Brush

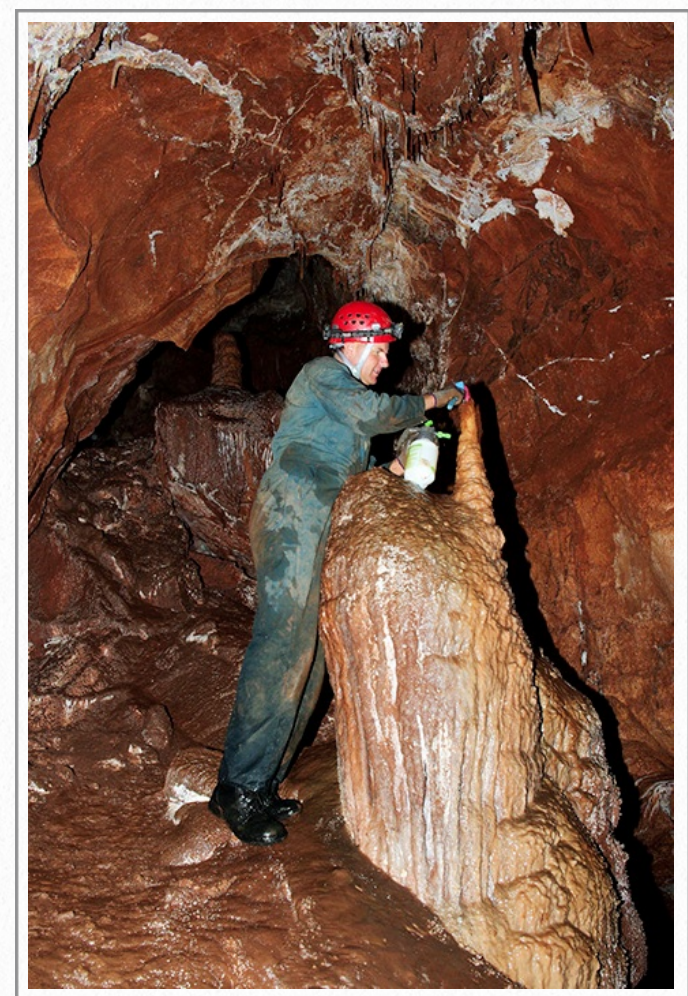


FIGURE 12 *NPWS worker cleaning area in ladder pitch chamber*

The specific aims of this project are to:

- rehabilitate significant features in the cave (such as decoration, wall and roof features and sensitive floor areas);
- minimise further damage to the cave system by providing track marking and signage in selected areas; and
- educate users in conserving the cave

The project will be conducted in the following framework

- Utilising the NPWS Access Permit system to educate and promote the Karst care project, track markings and other low impact caving requirements.
- ISS and CSS will manage the project and undertake extra trips to the cave to pursue the project and will encourage and promote other speleological societies to become interested and also participate
- The project will be using GIS software to keep track of areas or formations cleaned and a log of activities kept for future reference. Photographs of before and after cleaning have and will be taken to provide evidence of the success of the venture.

This is a long term project and the results will be shown to the NPWS and NSW cavers through photographic evidence, trip reports of clubs involved in the project, and Caves Australia articles, and a paper for the ASF Conference in 2013 (reports to NPWS on the project that will educate & inform other NPWS Karst Managers of the project and its outcomes)

Involvement and liaison with NPWS

The Senior Management of the NPWS Far South Coast Region support the karst care concept for Wyanbene and are investigating options to provide funding, materials and staffing support to assist in the management action plan and initial cleaning project.

The NPWS Officers in Deua Region based at Narooma obtained this finance under NPWS “Find it and fix it” program.

Conclusion

The process of cleaning Wyanbene cave has been more than successful and has rejuvenated many dirtied formations within the small areas cleaned to date. We have uncovered a few interesting formations that have been covered by mud for decades and this inspires us to continue cleaning various areas in the cave. A few pieces of ingrained graffiti that have been visible for years have been removed and improved the aesthetics of the cave for the general public in the entrance stream way and the Old Tourist Section.



FIGURE 13 *Formation near Cleopatra's Bath before cleaning*



FIGURE 14 *The same formation, after cleaning*

Welcome to Wyanbene Cave

Be one of the visitors to Wyanbene Cave who are talking about how great it looks.

"As a frequent visitor to this cave I have noticed a decrease in damage to formations and mud being tracked through the cave. The cave cleaning and restoration project being conducted by the speleological (caving) clubs and the NPWS has greatly assisted in helping me to reduce my impact, still enjoy the challenges of the cave and to have a fantastic view of the formations." Kerry from Canberra

Enjoy viewing the formations and cave passages by walking in the stream whilst in the entrance stream way and avoid walking on the muddy areas.

Caves are fragile environments. So take care but also take your time to look around and delight in your experience in this section of the cave.

Thank you

Illawarra Speleological Society, Canberra Speleological Society and the Narooma Office of NPWS.

For more information on caving or clubs go to www.caves.org.au

FIGURE 15 The positive sign messages for the public that have been placed inside the cave

It will be interesting to hear the feedback on the positive messages left on the signs to see if they make a difference in attitude to occasional visitors. Another idea is to leave laminated photographs of the areas before they were cleaned so that the public and cavers can see the difference and hopefully not dirty the cave in future.

We would like to thank the Narooma office of NSW NPWS for their assistance and the ASF Grant Fund for assisting us with the purchase of two hire pressure fire fighting portable backpack sprays that have proved invaluable in cleaning decades of mud from the formations.

There is a great deal to complete in this long term project and CSS and ISS encourage users to complete some cleaning in their trips into the cave in the future.

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Appendix 1 information given to NSW Speleological Clubs

Wyanbene Cave Restoration Project

Preliminary information

Canberra SS, Illawarra SS and the Narooma office of Deua NPWS are embarking on a cave cleaning/restoration project in Wyanbene Cave. After many years of public, speleological and other group use, the cave has seen a great deal of mud build up on formations, some of which has been inadvertently passed from one section of the cave to another.

The Deua NPWS Manager, Tony Baxter and a field worker from Braidwood were included in a preliminary investigation into the project to determine if the project was feasible. Tony has indicated strongly that if a club wants a permit to Wyanbene Cave and to include the restoration process as part of their permit then that will not be included in the 6 general permits that will be issued for that year under appendix 4 of the Deua KAMP.

We commenced some preliminary cleaning adjacent to Cleopatra's Bath area, the ladder pitch, in the Old Tourist section (OTS) and on Sunday in the Entrance streamway (ES).

The results have been more than satisfactory and the NPWS is writing a grant application for a pump, hose and signage with photos to be included in the OTS and ES to educate and encourage the public not to dirty the formation.

CSS and ISS will be the main proponents for the restoration work but we encourage other clubs that visit the area, to undertake a bit of cleaning on their journey through the cave and to minimise further mud contamination where ever possible.

We have placed a few small black mats on the mud section to assist entry and exit over the mud section near the ladder climb and have placed flagging tape around some formations that have been cleaned of mud in that chamber. There is also a path marked with flagging tape in the OTS for the moment to see how it goes until other track marking can be obtained. We would ask that the Cleopatra's Bath area be a boot re-

moval area and/or dirty trog suit removed to reduce further impact on this area. We are working on ideas for the Helictite Chamber.

There will be some cleaning equipment left in the ladder chamber for use by groups. And other equipment that can be given to groups as they pass by say Pheasants' Nest for a Sunday clean-up in the Entrance streamway or OTS. This gear can be returned to Canberra or Wollongong or an arranged place.

More information will be given at the next NSW Speleo Council meeting in May 2013 but for the meantime if you are intending to obtain a permit for Wyanbene and want to assist us please contact:

John Brush (johnbrush@ozemail.com.au) or
Bob Kershaw (rkershaw@ozemail.com.au)

for further information.