

Chasing mega caves in Vietnam

ALAN JACKSON, Southern Tasmanian Caverneers

The Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park in central Vietnam is home to several of the world's largest caves. British expeditions to the area have been running since the early 1990s by Deb and Howard Limbert. More than 180 kilometres of passage has been surveyed to date. The area is endowed with spectacular river caves and one of the key-aims of the expeditions is to locate and explore them. The area is home to Hang Sơn Đoòng, considered the world's 'biggest' cave, which was explored during the 2009 expedition.

This presentation doesn't aim to get bogged down in scientific detail but rather delight the senses with spectacular photography and video of massive caves, spectacular speleothems and jagged jungle-bound karst.

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Alan Jackson

The Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng National Park in central Vietnam is home to several of the world's largest caves. British expeditions to the area (and other parts of the country) have been running since the early 1990s, led by Deb and Howard Limbert. More than 180 km of passage has been surveyed to date yet no more than 30% of the total limestone massif has been prospected — the remaining potential is mind-blowing. Access is difficult (both politically and physically at times) with the particularly inhospitable jungle karst terrain often meaning the caves are a welcome relief from the rigours of the surface.

One of the key aims of expeditions is to locate and explore the base level river caves, which the area does spectacularly well. The area is home to Hang Sơn Đoòng, considered the world's 'biggest' cave, which was explored during the 2009 expedition.

Vital Statistics:

- 1990–present
- Around 30% of the Kẻ Bàng Massif explored
- Very remote and difficult access
- British cavers along with members of the Hanoi University of Science have explored since 1990
- ~20 major expeditions to Vietnam
- Over 600 caves explored in Vietnam
- 322 entrances in PNKB area — 186.5 km of survey

The expeditions have assisted in the following:

- Helped with National Park status in 1996
- Helped with World Heritage status 2003
- Caves now employ directly over 2,600 people
- Caving adventure tour companies now employ over 500 guides and porters
- Promotion of caving/jungle trekking as an adventure activity
- Work directly with National Park on conservation issues
- Work with UNESCO/IUCN
- Played a major role in promoting tourism in Quang Binh province
- 2.8 million visitors to the province in 2016.

When it all boils down this presentation didn't aim to get bogged down in scientific detail but rather delight the senses with spectacular photography, speleothems on steroids and jagged jungle-bound karst.

