

1.0 Introduction

Yarrangobilly Caves is located in the South Eastern Highlands within the northern half of Kosciuszko National Park. The Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct is an area of approximately six square kilometers located between the Snowy Mountains Highway and the Yarrangobilly River, south of Tumut and north of Adaminaby and Cooma. See Figure 1.1.

Local Aboriginal people's occupation of the region [the Walgalu] was disrupted by the influx of Europeans from the 1830s. The association of Aboriginal people with the Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct has yet to be fully understood.

The Caves Precinct was developed for public visitation from about 1879. Protection of the karst and caves and development of the Show Caves and construction of accommodation for cave visitors was an early Government enterprise. Most of the early building and cave infrastructure development work took place between the 1890s and 1938. After a long period of decline the Precinct was handed over to the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service in 1967.

The current Yarrangobilly Caves House complex is the core 1901, 1912-17 and 1937-8 purpose built structures that remain after the demolition of deteriorated and redundant structures by NPWS in the 1970s and 1980s.

Public use of the area is currently restricted to day use. The single storey Caves House building has recently been restored and re-painted, various infra-structure has been upgraded and/or its replacement is in process; the 1919 Caretakers Cottage is used as a Visitors Centre and Cave Tours are conducted by NPWS staff. The Thermal Pool is a local bathing facility and together with the picnic grounds and bush tracks is popular with visitors.

This Conservation Management Plan is a review of the 1989 Conservation Plan prepared by adg [arch design group] and the 1992 Conservation Plan and Development Control Plan prepared by Freeman, Collett & Partners. This Conservation Management Plan builds on the research and findings of those plans incorporating Aboriginal liaison and archaeological survey and additional landscape planning. The findings and guidelines in this document supersede the previous findings and Development Control Plan.

2.0 Significance Assessment

The following Summary Statement of Cultural Significance is an outcome of the significance assessment component of the study.

The Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct is a place of National environmental and cultural heritage significance. Located in the area of the earliest European crossings of the Alps in the northern part of Kosciuszko National Park, Europeans recorded finding the cave in 1834 and since the 1860s it has been progressively visited. From 1887 to this day the Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct has been purposefully developed by NSW Government agencies as a scenic and nature based tourist destination. The caves and the formations within these caves are considered to be of National significance due to the complexity and good condition of the cave formations by comparison with other cave systems within Australia.

The karst area as a whole is considered to be of State and/or National significance. The Yarrangobilly karst area is of significant extent, includes an extensive complex of limestone caves of outstanding aesthetic, scientific, educational and recreational value and contains a number of karst features including caves, sink holes, dolines and subterranean streams. The soil landscapes associated with the karst system are of significance as they are of restricted distribution within the tablelands of New South Wales. The geological features present in the Yarrangobilly area provide evidence for deep oceanic basins either side of a volcanic island arc, which is of scientific significance at a State level.

The tourist development associated with the caves is of State and/or National significance being one of a small set of resorts comprising Show Caves and Caves House accommodation complexes that comprised an early and important phase in the development of the Australian tourism industry. The development of Yarrangobilly was a State Government initiative that reflected the late 19th century recognition of, and pride in Australian natural icons and the popularity of scenic and nature tourism in the lead up to Federation.

The Caves House complex is of State significance being a rare example of the small set of late nineteenth and early twentieth century alpine resort buildings in the romanticised Federation Arts and Crafts style produced by the NSW Government Architects Office primarily during the tenures of Walter Liberty Vernon [1890-1911] and George McRae [1912-1923]. The Yarrangobilly Caves House complex is a simple representative example of the genre, which sits comfortably within the scenic grandeur of its remote valley setting. Yarrangobilly is recognised as a seminal tourist development being the first purpose built tourism resort within the Kosciuszko region.

The Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct has important historic associations with Oliver Trickett, who is recognised as an important figure in Australian speleology; with A Bradley who was one of an early small group of guides who took an exceptional interest in caves and their exploration and contributed to their popularity as tourist destinations; with several families of guides and caretakers who made an important contribution to the place [the Murrays, Bradleys, Hoads, Dunns and the Day families]; with Charles Kerry, the photographer and several early journalists, [the anonymous Sylvanus Urban] and has ongoing significance for the regional tourism industry and with local businesses and the local community.

The vegetation is considered to be of Regional significance, including several rare or threatened species, which are associated with the karst landscape present at Yarrangobilly, together with an unusual diversity of

mosses and lichens. There is a diverse range of fauna species known to be present including several threatened species associated with sheltered forest habitats along the Yarrangobilly River and the caves themselves. The Thermal Pool is of scientific interest and is valued as a local recreational resource. The Glory Farm is of local historical significance.

The Aboriginal Heritage of the area comprises a suite of Aboriginal sites which demonstrate the evolving pattern of Aboriginal cultural history and have the potential to yield information about local and regional adaptive strategies. The quality, extent and diversity of the prehistoric archaeological remains within the Precinct are not well understood at present. The sites have high research value at the local level and moderate value at the regional level. The sites are significant to the local Aboriginal community as a demonstration of their past presence in the valley.

The European cultural landscape and plantings are generally of Local significance, due to the lack of strong themes or association with the built environment. The larger trees in the picnic area and nearby have greater historical significance as they are associated with the development of the caves in the early 1900's and demonstrate involvement of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney in establishment of exotic trees in rural New South Wales at the turn of the century.

3.0 Conservation Policy

The following Precinct Philosophy Statement is the generator and philosophical basis of all the conservation policies provided in Section 7.0:

The National Parks and Wildlife Service will give precedence to the preservation and conservation of the natural Karst environment in the future management and development of the precinct. Within the constraints imposed by this objective, the management and development of the precinct, as an historic nature based tourist resort will continue to evolve, with potential to provide business partnering opportunities within the region.

4.0 Implementation Strategy

The proposed strategic approach for the future use and development of the site is a three stage process culminating in staged implementation.

Stage 1

Adopt the findings of the Conservation Management Plan in order to preserve the Precinct's significance values and minimise impacts to the karst.

Stage 2

Undertake a research and planning phase. Research new technology options for the Precinct needs including: sewerage disposal, power, supply, water purification and reticulation, communications equipment and on site visitor circulation and in the longer term undertake scientific studies and surveys. [It is recognised that some research in these areas is underway] Assess and prepare feasibility and business plans for future development options.

Stage 3

Staged implementation development based on the findings of the research and planning phase.

The following graphic outline encapsulates the approach described above and the Indicative Planning and Works Implementation table summarises the implementation recommendations detailed in Section 8.0.

