
5.0 Significance Assessment

5.1 Basis of Assessment

Assessment of cultural significance can be undertaken in a number of ways. The Burra Charter of Australia ICOMOS divides significance into aesthetic, historic, scientific and social categories. JS Kerr's The Conservation Plan (National Trust of Australia (NSW) 3rd Edition 1990) considers the concept of cultural significance according to three qualities: the ability of the place to demonstrate a process, custom or style; associational (historical) links for which there may or may not be surviving evidence; and formal or aesthetic qualities. As part of the Australian Heritage Commission's recognition of National Estate values a series of assessment criteria have been developed for use in assessing heritage items, places or natural environments. These criteria are broadly related to those presented in the Burra Charter and those developed by the New South Wales Heritage Office and Department of Urban Affairs and Planning as outlined in the NSW Heritage Manual (NSWHM).

Previous Assessments of the Significance of the Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct have been prepared for the 1989 **arch design group** Conservation Plan and the 1992 Freeman Collett and Partners Conservation Plan. However, since then the assessment criteria used by the Heritage Office in NSW have been reviewed and reduced. The NSW_HM criteria, which consider historical, aesthetic, technical/ research and social significance within a comparative context (rarity and representativeness) are used to consider the significance of the Yarrangobilly Caves Precinct.

The following analysis considers the findings of the previous studies and incorporates them in this analysis augmented by new material resulting from this study.

5.2 Significance Assessment

5.2.1 Historical Significance (Evolution and Association)

Significant because of the importance of the association with or position in the evolving pattern of our cultural history - with phases activities or people.

Representativeness

Aboriginal

Aboriginal sites within the area demonstrate the evolving pattern of Aboriginal cultural history and patterns of movement through the region.

The place has significance in terms of an apparently successful adaptation to an upland environment.

Natural

Not Applicable

Post Contact

The development of Cave based tourist resorts during the latter half of the nineteenth century including Yarrangobilly was a world-wide trend associated with the exploration of Caves and cave systems in the spirit of exploring a new frontier.

The development of Yarrangobilly was an outcome of the emergence of the romantic Grand Tour as a nineteenth century approach to tourism that saw the emergence of Scenic tourism reflecting the rise of the popularity of the picturesque, a component of the Mannerist movement.

Yarrangobilly was an early site combining tourism with specific aspects of the Australian landscape and the development of the public transport system [coach and rail].

Yarrangobilly Caves are associated with early artistic and photographic interpretations of Caves that were a component of the rise of nascent nationalism associated with pride in Australia's natural environment.

In Australia the identification and development of Show caves and cave based tourist resorts was part of the quest for national identity and icons in the build up to the adoption of a Federation of States.

Interest in the development of the Thermal Pool was associated with the popularity of hydro-therapy in Europe and the rise of the spa and health resort in Australia.

The continued popularity of the Thermal Pool is associated with the Australian love of the beach and swimming opportunities.

Yarrangobilly Caves and the development of the Caves House complex has a strong association with Oliver Trickett who is recognised as the father of speleology in New South Wales and who is notable in speleology in Australia. In the beginning of the twentieth century Trickett mapped and described most of the known caves in NSW.

Yarrangobilly was one of a small set of places where early guides, A Bradley and L Hoad, took an exceptional interest in caves and their exploration and contributed to their popularity as tourist destinations [others were J Wilson and J Wiburd of Jenolan, L Guymer of Bungonia, W Redden of N~~a~~eracoorte and F Moon of Buchan].

The Yarrangobilly Caves House complex is associated with the Government Architects Walter Liberty Vernon [1890-1911] and George McRae, [1912-1923] although it is possible that Edward Lambert Drew and GM Blair were the main architects for the Two Storey Wing.

Yarran~~g~~obilly is located in the area of the earliest Europe~~a~~n crossings of the alps in the Koscius~~z~~ko region.

Natural

~~Not Applicable~~Aboriginal

~~Aboriginal sites within the area demonstrate the evolving pattern of Aboriginal cultural history and patterns of movement through the region.~~

~~The place has significance in terms of an apparently successful adaptation to an upland environment.~~

Rarity

Aboriginal

Not Applicable

Natural

Not Applicable

Post Contact

The identification of Show Caves at Yarrangobilly, Jenolan and Wombeyan and their protection with the appointment of caretakers was an early development in the care and preservation of

the natural environment which preceded the development of National Parks in Australia and Yellowstone National Park in the United States.

Yarrangobilly is the first major tourist resort development in the Kosciuszko ~~M~~mountains region.

The Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct represents an early government sponsored tourist destination development in New South Wales and was a seminal tourist development in the region.

Yarrangobilly is one of a small set of Show caves developed in the late nineteenth century in Australia.

Yarrangobilly is the only tourist cave/ karst complex with its catchment completely protected within a National Park.

Yarrangobilly is an early example of nature based tourism in New South Wales.

Yarrangobilly is one of only three known historic Caves House complexes still existing within Australia [Jenolan, ~~and~~ Yarrangobilly in NSW and Yallingup in WA].

Yarrangobilly has one of the only two thermal pools associated with a major show cave complex, the other being at Hastings Caves Tasmania [which does not include a Caves House].

Natural

Not Applicable

Aboriginal

Not Applicable

5.2.2 Aesthetic/ Creative Significance

Significant for strong visual, or sensory appeal or cohesion; landmark qualities; creative and/or technical (including architectural excellence) qualities; creative and /or technical (including architectural) excellence.

Representativeness

Aboriginal

Not Applicable

Natural

The karst area is considered to be a place of considerable aesthetic value set in an area of high scenic quality.

The views from the Precinct up Yarrangobilly Gorge and across to the associated clifflines are of high scenic value.

Post Contact

The initial development phase of Yarrangobilly Caves House is associated with the Victorian period fascination with cave aesthetics and the scenic and landmark qualities associated with the karst environments which provides the setting for the caves.

Yarrangobilly Caves House is a good representative example of the romanticised Federation Arts and Crafts architectural style with Tudor influences that was adopted by the NSW Government Architects office around the turn of the century as suitable for Alpine/ mountain holiday resorts.

The design of Yarrangobilly and other resorts of the period [Jenolan, Wombeyan, Kosciuszko Hotel and the Creel at Thredbo ~~—was the creel at Thredbo or on the Thredbo River???~~] were strongly influenced by the Australian Federation style of architecture, which was prevalent at the time.

The design of the Yarrangobilly Caves House complex complements the grandeur of its enclosed valley setting.

The Caves and the surrounding topography have long been appreciated for their scenic qualities and have been photographed by many photographers including Trickett, Charles Kerry and Tant Bradley Charles Kerry and painted by artists. Photographs of the caves appeared on numerous postcards.

The dry stone retaining walling supporting the tracks to the caves mainly constructed in the period 1907-~~108~~ makes a positive contribution to the aesthetics of the cultural landscape.

Natural

~~The karst area is considered to be a place of considerable aesthetic value set in an area of high scenic quality. The views from the Precinct up Yarrangobilly Gorge and across to the associated clifflines are of high scenic value.~~

Aboriginal

~~Not Applicable~~

Rarity

Aboriginal

Not Applicable

Natural

The karst area as a whole is of outstanding and exceptional aesthetic value.

Post Contact

The Yarrangobilly Caves House complex is one of a small set of surviving nineteenth century alpine resort buildings in the romanticised Federation Arts and Crafts style produced by the NSW Government Architects Office into the early twentieth century.

The three main surviving construction period of the Caves House complex [1901.1912-17 and 1938] show a consistency of design intent and detailing, which is a rare achievement in an evolving building.

Natural

~~The karst area as a whole is of outstanding and exceptional aesthetic value.~~

Aboriginal

~~Not Applicable~~

5.2.3 Technical Research Significance

Significant because of its contribution or potential contribution, to an understanding of our cultural history or environment.

Representativeness

Aboriginal

The archaeological research potential and educational value of the Aboriginal occupation sites is high.

Natural

The karst area as a whole is of significant extent, includes an extensive complex of limestone caves and is of outstanding scientific and educational value and contains a number of karst features including caves, sink holes, dolines and subterranean streams.

The geological features present in the Yarrangobilly area provide evidence for deep oceanic basins either side of a volcanic island arc.

There is a diverse range of fauna species known to be present.

The whole karst catchment is protected within a National Park.

Post Contact

The Caves House complex of buildings and infrastructure is a representative example of building practices and technology in Australia and New South Wales over the period 1901 to 1938.

The sub-surface archaeological deposits and above ground archaeology at Yarrangobilly associated with European occupation of the site has potential to provide information about the lifestyle and life-ware of the people who historically occupied the site.

Natural

~~The karst area as a whole is of significant extent, includes an extensive complex of limestone caves and is of outstanding scientific and educational value and contains a number of karst features including caves, sink holes, dolines and subterranean streams.~~

~~The geological features present in the Yarrangobilly area provide evidence for deep oceanic basins either side of a volcanic island arc.~~

~~There is a diverse range of fauna species known to be present.~~

Aboriginal

~~The archaeological research potential and educational value of the Aboriginal occupation sites is high.~~

Rarity

Aboriginal

The place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's Aboriginal cultural history, occupation patterns, stone tool technology, and burial practice. Inter-

and intra-site patterning is not well understood in spite of general models of Aboriginal seasonal movement.

Natural

The caves and formations within the caves are very rare among limestone caves for their complexity and good condition by comparison with other cave systems within Australia.

The soil landscapes associated with the karst system are of restricted distribution within the tablelands of New South Wales.

The vegetation includes 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 are several threatened fauna species associated with sheltered forest habitats along the Yarrangobilly River and in the caves themselves.

Post Contact

The development and promotion of Yarrangobilly and other show caves as tourist destinations is an early and unusual aspect of the development of tourism and nature based tourism in Australia that is worthy of research.

Natural

~~The caves and formations within the caves are very rare among limestone caves for their complexity and good condition by comparison with other cave systems within Australia.~~

~~The soil landscapes associated with the karst system are of restricted distribution within the tablelands of New South Wales.~~

~~The vegetation includes 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 are several threatened fauna species associated with sheltered forest habitats along the Yarrangobilly River and in the caves themselves.~~

Aboriginal

~~The place has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's Aboriginal cultural history, occupation patterns, stone tool technology, and burial practice. Inter- and intra-site patterning is not well understood in spite of general models of Aboriginal seasonal movement.~~

5.2.4 Social Significance

Significant through association with a contemporary community for social, spiritual or other reasons.

Representativeness

Aboriginal

The place is important to the Aboriginal community for social, cultural and spiritual reasons.

The place has evidence of prehistoric occupation in the form of a number of occupation sites and is a place where burial took place.

The Walgalu Aboriginal community of the region have asserted their cultural affiliation to the place. The sites have significance to the Aboriginal community because they demonstrate this association in spite of assertions that they never occupied the valley.

Natural

The karst area as a whole is of outstanding recreational value.

Post Contact

Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct is an important component of the regional tourism resource, which is valued by the regional business community.

Yarrangobilly, the picnic grounds, the Thermal Pool, the caves, the river and the surrounding bush is an important place for nature based recreation in the region that is highly valued by the surrounding local communities.

The former guides, [caretakers](#) and their families who grew up at Yarrangobilly hold the place in high regard and have important stories to tell about their association with the place.

Yarrangobilly is an important place for people with an interest in speleology, for local and regional speleological associations and bush walking clubs.

Yarrangobilly is an important part of the Kosciuszko National Park, which is held in high regard by contemporary park users and by the National Parks Association. The Glory [Hole](#) Farm is an important part of the history of the development of the region highly valued by descendants of the Harris family and by members of the local Historical Society.

Natural

~~The karst area as a whole is of outstanding recreational value.~~

Aboriginal

~~The place is important to the Aboriginal community for social, cultural and spiritual reasons.~~

~~The place has evidence of prehistoric occupation in the form of a number of occupation sites and is a place where burial took place.~~

~~The Walgalu Aboriginal community of the region have asserted their cultural affiliation to the place. The sites have significance to the Aboriginal community because they demonstrate this association in spite of assertions that they never occupied the valley.~~

Rarity

Aboriginal

Not Applicable

Natural

Not Applicable

Post Contact

Not Applicable

Natural

Not Applicable

Aboriginal

Not Applicable

5.3 Summary Statement of Significance

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 in relation to 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.

5.4 Relative Significance

The following Table (Table 5.2) [together with the more detailed tables presented in Section 3.0](#) identifies and ranks the relative significance of individual elements of the complex based on historic information and fabric evidence. (Associated management actions are provided in section 8.0) Significance values are based on historic and fabric evidence. Areas of failed fabric are generally rated lower than the intact item would be.

Table 5.1 Ranking and associated contribution to significance

5 Very high Significance
4 High Significance
3 Some Significance
2 Low Significance
1 No Significance
0 Detracting Element

Table 5.2 Item and Significance Value (See Table 8.1 for Significance Management)

Item	Significance Value
Yarrangobilly Caves House Precinct Overall	5
Caves and Formations within the Caves	5
Karst system/environment	4/5
Geological features	4
Vegetation [4 = rare]	3/4
Fauna [4 = rare]	3/4
Aboriginal Cultural heritage	4
Caves House Complex	4
1901 Caves House	4
1912-17 Two Storey Wing	4

Item	Significance Value
1938 Additions [Dining Room, Bar & rear lounge]	3/4
c.1980s alterations and toilet block	2
Thermal Pool	4
Large swimming pool	4
Wading/ outlet pool	3
Change rooms/ Toilet Block	2
Steps	2
Inlet and Outlet stream	4
Picnic Grounds	4
BBQ Shelter	1
European Cultural landscape generally	2
Larger trees in the Picnic area	4
Toilet Block	1
Hydro System [Current]	2
Pelton Wheel	5
Shed and current technology	2
Dam and Penstocks	3
Water Supply System	3
Sewerage System	2/3
Archaeological Resources generally	3/2
Glory Hole Farm Site and archaeological resources	4
Coach Roads to Kiandra and Tumut	4

Item	Significance Value
Connecting Loop Road	3
Road to Thermal Pool	3
Tracks and pathways to Caves	3/4
Walking Tracks generally	3
Cave Infrastructure Generally	3
Historic Lighting Schemes	3
Historic paths, ladders, walkways and entrance doors	3