Buchan Caves Reserve

Visitor Guide

Some of the most spectacular limestone formations in Australia can be found at Buchan Caves Reserve in East Gippsland. Hundreds of caves are located in this region with two of the finest within the Buchan Caves Reserve. The reserve is also a wildlife refuge and features cabins, wilderness retreats, camping and recreation facilities surrounded by beautiful exotic and native trees.

Location and access
Buchan Caves Reserve is 360 km from Melbourne along the Princes Highway. The reserve is 60 minutes from Bairnsdale along a good sealed road, or 45 minutes from Lakes Entrance. Travel via Bruthen or Nowa Nowa.

Features and facilities
Buchan Caves Reserve provides facilities for both day visitors and overnight campers. You will find cabins, wilderness retreats, powered and unpowered sites, hot showers, toilets, laundry, camper's kitchen and electric and wood fired barbeques. There is also a playground and a swimming pool which is fed from an underground stream. The Visitor Centre boasts an interpretative display of the cave systems within the reserve.

The reserve has abundant wildlife. Listen for the Bellbirds and Lyrebirds near the Fairy Cave entrance. Kangaroos are plentiful, but please do not feed or disturb them. At night the campground comes alive with Brush-tailed Possums and sometimes the calls of Boobook Owls.

Cave tours
Guided tours are conducted each day of the year except for Christmas Day. From the September school holidays to Easter, there are 5 tours daily. After the Easter school holidays until the September school holidays there are 3 tours daily.

From ancient times
The limestone rock at Buchan was laid down during the Devonian period about 300 - 400 million years ago. At the time the seas covered this area of East Gippsland which was alive with shellfish and coral.

Their remains were deposited in layers and over the years compacted to form limestone. As the ocean receded, the limestone was subjected to severe earth movement, which folded and crumpled the land into its present formation.

Forming a cave
The layers of limestone are known are ‘bedding planes’. Vertical joint lines across the bedding planes allow water to seep through the rock, and over time this water action slowly dissolves the limestone. This is how cave development begins.

Over many thousands of years the water eventually carves out the rock leaving large chambers and passages. The underground rivers are now dry or have altered their course, although there are still small flows in the wet season when the caves come alive.

Cave decorations
Decorations in caves are caused by seepage of rainwater through tiny cracks in limestone rock. When this water reaches a cave droplets accumulate on the ceiling. Carbon dioxide gas is then released from the water droplet leaving a small ring of calcite. Over thousands of years this process continues, drop after drop, slowly forming a stalactite.

In faster growing periods the water splashes to the floor forming stalagmites. Sometimes the stalactites and stalagmites meet to form a pillar or a column. When the water flows down the walls or roof of a cave at a slight angle, blanket or shawl decorations are produced. Large ‘flowstone’ formations resembling waterfalls are caused by water flowing over ledges of rock or gravel banks.

Calcite (calcium carbonate) is naturally white but is sometimes stained red, brown or orange by iron oxide in the soil.
Exploring Fairy Cave

In March 1907, while exploring the Buchan Reserve, Frank Moon found a small but deep hole, which he enlarged. He lowered himself by rope 15 metres into what is now known as the Fairy Cave. A loose rock fall at the end of the cave prevented further exploration at that time. The Fairy Cave was opened to the public in December 1907.

Exploring Royal Cave

Discovered in 1910 when Frederick Wilson (the supervisor of the reserve), Constable Brown (the local policeman) and Frank Moon, dug through a loose rock fall in the Fairy Cave and followed a stream passage between the two caves. An entrance tunnel was constructed by 1913, after which the cave was opened for public inspection.