

Buchan Caves Reserve

Krauatungalung Country

Visitor Guide



Nestled in a picturesque valley in East Gippsland, the Buchan Caves Reserve hides an underground world of colour and enchantment just waiting to be discovered. Hundreds of caves are located in this region and some of the most spectacular limestone formations in Australia can be found here. The reserve is home to the Royal Cave and Fairy Cave, two of the finest caves in the region boasting elaborate stalactites and stalagmites and beautiful calcite.



Welcome to Country

The Gunaikurnai people are the Traditional Owners of the Country featured in this visitor guide.

Through a new way of managing public land called Joint Management, the State has created an equal partnership with the Gunaikurnai people. The benefits of this partnership are many and include: the knowledge and culture of traditional owners incorporated into natural resources (land) management, cultural awareness and knowledge of local history, improved park management through knowledge-sharing and increased opportunities for new initiatives.

By conserving and protecting the natural environment and cultural values, the education and enjoyment experience is enhanced for all community members and visitors.

Buchan Caves Reserve is one of the jointly managed parks within Gippsland. This agreement recognises the fact that the Gunaikurnai people have always been connected to their land and are the rightful people who speak for that Country. These parks and reserves are cultural landscapes which are part of our living culture.

Getting there

Buchan Caves Reserve is located 360km east of Melbourne. The Reserve is 60 mins from Bairnsdale via Bruthen (B500/C620/C608), or 45 mins from Lakes Entrance via Nowa Nowa (A1/C620/C608).

Things to see and do

Cave tours

Buchan Caves Reserve is famous for its honeycomb of caves full of spectacular limestone formations..

The caves were formed over many thousands of years by underground rivers cutting through limestone rock. The formations are created by rain water seeping through cracks and dissolving some of the limestone. As each droplet comes through the roof it deposits calcite which crystallises in a small ring. In time, stalactites are formed on the roof of the cave, and stalagmites build up from droplets which fall to the floor.

Royal Cave and Fairy Cave are open for guided tours daily, except Christmas Day. Tickets can be purchased 24 hours in advance online, go to www.parks.vic.gov.au/stay or in person on the day at the Visitor Centre within the Reserve. There are five tours daily between the September school holidays and Easter and three tours daily for the rest of the year.

Walking

For the short easy walks, all you need are sturdy shoes with good tread and comfortable clothing. For the longer and more demanding walks, a reasonable level of fitness, good boots and plenty of water are recommended. For your safety please remain on the walking tracks.

Moon Hill Walk – 0.5km, 30 minutes return

This short walk leads to viewpoints overlooking the reserve and the Buchan Valley. It passes Moon Cave along the way, so bring a torch and have a look in the entrance. The track continues past the Devils Punchbowl, a large collapsed cave system, to the top of the hill. From here you can see the extent of the exposed limestone on both sides of the valley in the reserve, a little further across visit the lookout for beautiful views of the Buchan Valley.

If you continue on and join Northern Arm Track, it will lead you back to the campground, which will be an additional 30 minutes.

Spring Creek Walk – 3km, 1.5 hours return

This superb walk splits into the higher Tea Tree Track and the lower Kanooka Track with both meeting at the Spring Creek Falls viewing platform. The Tea Tree Track is an adventurous walk that has some steep areas on its way up to the falls. A short distance along the track to your left, the rock type changes from the grey Buchan Caves Limestone to the older Snowy River Volcanics.

To come back, take the lower Kanooka Track. This track criss-crosses the creek and features mossy rocks, beautiful ferns and trees dominated by Kanooka. Keep an eye out for Lyrebirds, Gippsland Water Dragons, Kookaburras, King Parrots and other wildlife.

Caves Reserve Track – 4km, 2 hours return

This walk starts opposite the playground and follows a fire access track along a ridge to the north western corner of the reserve.

Turn left at the intersection to meet up with the Spring Creek Walking Track and the Granite Pools Walking Track. The Caves Reserve Track returns to the campground via the Northern Arm Track.

Granite Pools Walk – 4km, 2.5 hours return

One of the steeper walks in the reserve, it makes its way through some tall timber and moss covered gullies. Look out for lyrebirds on you way and enjoy the wonderful views of the Buchan Valley.

FJ Wilson interpreted walk – 2km, 1 hour return

This walk is named after Frederick Wilson, who came to Buchan in 1907 from Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains (NSW) and contributed significantly to the development of the reserve

This walk starts about 100m east of the Visitor Centre following the Royal Cave exit track and ends near the Fairy Cave entrance. From here you can return along the main road through the reserve. Numbered posts along the walk refer to points below.

1. Discovering stream passages

Behind this entrance a short tunnel leads to the Federal Cave. It is more than 400m long and contains very white and strikingly beautiful formations.

Discovered by Frederick Wilson and William Bonwick in 1915, the cave was opened to visitors in 1917.

Wilson and Bonwick discovered the Federal Cave by following a stream passage leading from the Royal Cave. This stream passage passes through Fairy, Royal, Federal and Dukes Caves, ending its journey at the swimming pool.

Until 1970 Federal Cave was lit by power generated here at the reserve. When electricity was connected to Fairy and Royal Caves, Federal Cave was closed and sealed off.

Interest in Federal Cave has grown in recent times and it is now available for specialised tours during Christmas, Easter and all school holidays. In 2007 a low voltage lighting system powered by solar energy was introduced into the Federal Cave by the Friends of Buchan Caves.

2. Limestone at Buchan

The limestone at Buchan formed about 380 million years ago under very shallow seas covering much of East Gippsland. A later period of movement of the earth's crust raised this area above sea level. Limestone is a rock that contains more than 50% calcium carbonate, which is usually present as the mineral calcite.

The skeletons of most marine animals that lack backbones, such as corals, starfish, sea urchins and shells are made up of calcium carbonate. Some algae can also produce calcium carbonate. The limestone here is composed of dark grey lime mud with numerous fossils scattered throughout.

Look at the small grooves in this rock, called 'Rillenkarran' or 'Solution Flutes'. They are formed by rainwater draining across the rock, gently dissolving the limestone. As time goes by, the grooves become deeper.

3. Hidden fossils

The Royal Caves tour ends here. Although Royal Cave was discovered in 1910, this artificial exit tunnel wasn't completed until 1929. Look for fossils in the limestone wall built around the exit.

4. Natural steps

Notice here how the steps have been made from the layers of limestone. These layers are known as 'bedding planes'. Vertical joint lines across the bedding planes allow water to seep through the rock from the surface, and over time this water action slowly dissolves the limestone.

This is how cave development begins. Good examples of fossilised coral and brachiopods can be found here in the rock.

5. Shh...what can you hear?

From here, take a moment to stop and listen for Lyrebirds and Bell Miners. Did you know that the Lyrebird can perfectly imitate just about any sound it hears?

From here, head towards the Fairy Cave entrance and down the steps back to the main road. On your way back to the Visitor Centre take your time to look at the many ornamental trees planted in the reserve since the 1930s.

Wildlife

The reserve is a refuge for wildlife with over 100 species of birds recorded, including King Parrots, White Winged Choughs and Currawongs which can be seen around the camp area. Listen for the Bellbirds and Lyrebirds near the Fairy Cave entrance.

Kangaroos are plentiful throughout the reserve. At night the campground comes alive with Brush-tailed Possums and the calls of Boobook Owls.

Please do not feed the wildlife. They find their food in the wild. Feeding them can result in diseases, aggressive behaviour and an unnatural reliance on humans for food.

Dogs and other pets are not permitted in the park.

Picnicking

Buchan Caves is a great place for a family picnic. There are electric and woodfired barbecues to cook on and plenty of tables and shelters around the reserve. There is also a playground and a swimming pool which is fed from an underground stream. The Visitor Centre boasts an interpretive display of the cave systems.

Camping and accommodation

There is a range of accommodation options at Buchan Caves Reserve. Shared facilities include hot showers, toilets, a laundry, a camper's kitchen and electric and wood fired barbecues.

To book, go to www.parks.vic.gov.au/stay or call 13 1963.

Campground

The campground has 41 sites with power and an additional 20 sites without power.

Wilderness Camp – fixed tents

Wilderness tents offer a unique low-impact camping experience and include exclusive use of the fully fitted out camp kitchen.

Two of the tents are set up for couples but can comfortably sleep up to four people. Each contains a queen size bed, two bedside tables, a table and chairs, a single futon chair that converts to a single bed, a single trundle bed under the queen size bed, and a small fridge.

The other three tents are set up for groups and have three bunk beds and comfortably sleep up to six people. Each contains a small fridge and a table and chairs. BYO linen.

Cabins

- A double bed and a bunk containing three single beds. Bring your bed linen and towels.
- Shower and toilet facilities
- Kitchenette containing stove top and microwave

Caves House – luxury accommodation

Historic Caves House offers a truly luxurious experience while staying at the Buchan Caves Reserve. It features:

- Sleeps up to eight people with three bedrooms featuring queen size beds and one ante room with two single beds.
- All linen supplied
- Fully furnished throughout with heating and cooling options
- Beautiful covered front deck with river views
- Outdoor BBQ and fire

Be prepared and stay safe

This park is in the East Gippsland fire district. Bushfire safety is a personal responsibility. Anyone entering parks and forests during the bushfire season needs to stay aware of forecast weather conditions. Check the Fire Danger Rating and for days of Total Fire Ban at www.emergency.vic.gov.au, on the VicEmergency smartphone app or call the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226. No fires may be lit on Total Fire Ban days. On Code Red Fire Danger Rating days this park will be closed for public safety. Closure signs will be erected but do not expect an official warning. Check the latest conditions at www.parks.vic.gov.au or by calling 13 1963. For emergency assistance call Triple Zero (000). **December 2017**