

To: The South Australian Heritage Committee

From: Manager, Heritage Conservation Branch

Subject: REGISTER NOMINATION:  
BLANCHE AND VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
NARACOORTE CAVES

Date: 24 February 1983

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#### SUMMARY

This report has been prepared following the identification of the Heritage potential of these Caves. An analysis of the Caves has resulted in the nomination of two by the Heritage Conservation Branch. These two represent the contrast in approach to the utilization of Caves and also embody notable natural features which may exist individually elsewhere. A plan of management is being prepared for the Naracoorte Caves and the Branch has liaised with National Parks on its content.

Historically, the Caves are significant because their use by man reflects changing perceptions of outstanding natural features. Very little apparent impact from Aborigines was followed by the utilization of Blanche Cave as a venue for social gatherings by early white settlers. This resulted in the imposition of man's tastes upon the approaches to, and the interior of, Blanche Cave, including vandalism. By contrast, the rich fossil beds discovered in Victoria Fossil Cave have proved a focus of scientific study and public education of overriding natural Heritage significance. The Victoria Fossil Cave is recognised as being of world significance.

Physically, the Caves represent the result of changes in approach by white man towards natural features. Blanche Cave demonstrates the Victorian attitude of a recreational 'grotto' and Victoria Cave illustrates the later attitude of appreciation and education through minimal disturbance.

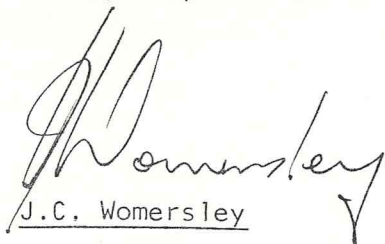
Environmentally, the Caves are not visual features in the environmental sense but Blanche Cave is, and was, a familiar local landmark.

The Integrity of the Caves is basically intact considering they are being considered as natural elements 'interfered with' by man.

The Caves are not listed on either the National Trust or the National Estate Registers.

#### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Blanche Cave and Victoria Fossil Cave, Naracoorte Caves, be placed on the Register and categorized H1, H3, A3.

  
J.C. Womersley

Australian Heritage Act 1978-80	ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Historic Site	
	Item	BLANCHE CAVE NARACOORTE CAVES (Formerly Big Cave, Mosquito Plains Cave)
Age 1845 Discovered	Theme	Office 7023-11604
Period 1837-1913	Subject EDUCATION AND CULTURE/Recreation	Region 6 South East
Site Type CAVE	Boundaries Refer to Map	Status -

#### Qualitative Data

Component

Comment

Grading

E VG AG FP NZ

#### History

- Context Associated with the social and recreational life of settlers from the mid 1840's, Blanche Cave was the State's first Cave tourist attraction, a curiosity of which was the calcified remains of an Aborigine.
- Person/Group: Local residents  
Guano Miners  
National Parks & Wildlife Service
- Event: 1845 Blanche Cave discovered by Mr. John Robertson.  
1857 Remains of Aboriginal discovered by Government interpreter.  
1862 First of many "New Year Parties" held in Blanche Cave.  
1871 Guano mining permitted by Government.  
1972 Naracoorte Caves Reserve transferred from Woods & Forests to National Parks & Wildlife Service.

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#### Physical Components

- Natural Elements: Three main chambers of limestone and calcified material, two large holes from the roof collapsing allow light and air inside, first chamber is largest but least intact, others have also been interfered with.
- Man-Made Elements: All three chambers have been 'cleared' to some extent for public use, stone line paths on the surface, concrete 'grotto' entrance, benches, fernery created at one opening, stone retaining walls.
- Representation: As a Cave with its stalagtites and stalagmites this Cave leaves much to be desired by comparison to the rest at Naracoorte, but as an example of the result of Victorian attitudes towards natural features it is particularly good.

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South  
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1978-80

ITEM EVALUATION SHEET  
Historic Sites

Item BLANCHE CAVE  
NARACORTE

Component

Comment

Grading

E VG AG FP NA

Environment

7. Continuity: Supportive of the expected atmosphere around the Cave's area, by their nature they are not visually accessible from one another.
8. Local Character: The largest single space in the Caves complex and well known.
9. Landmark: Familiar local landmark.

Integrity

10. Alterations: (Accepting its interfered with state). Benches appear to have been replaced, trellis and some landscaping removed at entrance.
11. Condition: No obvious faults.
12. Compatibility: Used for tours, no utilization for functions as in the past.

Supplementary Information

- Adaptation: The entrance area should be re-established at least in the spirit of the original treatment. The introduction of new facilities and aids should recognise both its natural and man-made qualities. Consideration might be given to controlled use by groups as in its past.
- Interpretation: The Cave is excellent as a venue for active interpretation. The contrast between the treatment by white man of this natural cave and the other nomination (Fossil Cave) should be stressed. In its disturbed state, this Cave could provide a venue for the evolution of the display techniques used in cave tours.
- Current Ownership: Department of Environment, National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Evaluated By Iris Iwanicki, Register Historian  
Ivar Nelsen, Register Architect

Date

Reviewed By Mark A. Butcher, Register Supervisor

Date

I.E.S./D4/211081

HISTORICAL RESEARCH REPORT: BLANCHE CAVE, NARACOORTE

Blanche Cave was the first cave discovered by white settlers in the south east of South Australia. Discovered in 1845, it had by 1862 been described in detail by the Rev. J.E. Tenison-Woods, in his "Geological Observations in South Australia". An extract of his account is as follows:

"About twenty five miles north of Penola, on the sheep run of Mt. Robertson, in the midst of a swampy sandy country, plentifully covered with stringy bark, a series of caves are found, whose internal beauty is at strange variance with the wildness of the scenery around. There is nothing, outwardly to show that any great subterraneous excavation might be expected. The entrance to them is merely a round hole, situated on the top of a hill; and, were it not for the existence of certain temporary huts, and other unmistakable signs of the former frequent visits of Bush excursionists, one might be inclined to pass the place without noticing anything peculiar". <sup>1</sup>

Fr. Woods continued to describe the entrance to the cave as "a small sloping path" which led beneath a shelf of rock to a massive cave twenty five feet below ground, lit by an aperture at the opposite end". He compared the first chamber, one of three, to "an immense Gothic Cathedral and the numbers of half finished stalagmites to kneeling or prostrate forms, ... worshippers in that silent and solemn place".

The cave provided an early recreational venue for people in the area, with many parties, dances and picnics organised in the first chamber. Steps, tables and benches were provided. It became a popular visiting place for people travelling through the area, and various accounts of parties exploring the caves can be found in early letters and records. <sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, many of the visitors to the cave had little regard for preserving its features, and after years of careless and destructive use, the cave's more delicate features so vividly described by Fr. Woods had disappeared. Efforts to prevent the destruction were made when it became apparent that some control was necessary. In 1855, the Forest Board appointed the first caretaker of The Caves, introducing guided tours and beautification scheme. William Reddan, the Caretaker of the Naracoorte Caves between 1887 to 1919, discovered several more caves in the area, including Victoria Cave (1898) and Alexandra Cave (1908).

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1. Woods, Geological Observations in South Australia, 1862, p.323.
  2. The S.A. Register, 13/6/1868.



In 1915 control of the caves passed to the S.A. Tourist Bureau. The Caves Reserve was dedicated in 1917 and rededicated in 1972 as a Conservation Park under the new National Parks and Wildlife Service. Eventually, the area was found to contain approximately 60 caves over an area of 223 acres.

One notorious feature of Blanche Cave was the calcified remains of an Aboriginal found in the third chamber, believed to have died there following a clash between white settlers and the Aboriginals over sheep stealing. During 1861 the body was taken from the cave by a travelling showman who, when charged with stealing, claimed his action was motivated by scientific curiosity, in much the same way as the British removed Egyptian relics to England. This argument fell upon deaf ears. When ordered to return the body, the showman complied, but stole the body a second time with the intention of exhibiting it in England. It disappeared from notoriety until 1868, when the Register reported its auction in England.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 20th Century, a fern garden was a feature of the second chamber, containing a number of varieties of ferns. This epitomised the "grotto" emulated by landscape architects in private gardens during the Victorian era, dating probably from the 18th Century when garden design turned from the stylised geometric form to a more natural and apparently unregulated form.

The entrance steps and paving stones that define a path to the entrance of the cave are rough hewn, enhancing the grotto effect and reflecting the era in which they were constructed. The retention of the entrance paving archway and reinstatement of the fern display in the second chamber would effectively help to preserve the character of what would have been South Australia's first cave tourist attraction. The history of the cave's discovery and subsequent use and misuse by Europeans illustrates early patterns of settlement, including social and recreational life. Initial conflict between the Aboriginals and Europeans and their respective impact upon the caves contribute to an understanding of the differences between the two cultures.

#### Sources:

Rev. J.E. Woods, Geological Observations in S.A., Land, Longman, 1862.  
 Procs. Third Aust. Conf. Cave Tourism and Management, Mt. Gambier, May, 1979.  
 S.A. Register, July 28, 1866, April 30, 1879.  
 Quiz and Lantern, 12th Jan., 1894, p.13.  
 SAA RN240  
 Observer      Oct. 5, 1861  
                  Nov. 30, 1861  
                  Jan. 4, 1862  
                  Feb. 1, 1862

Iris Iwanicki  
Register Historian  
 11:JD  
 21/9/82

Australian Heritage Act 1978-80	ITEM EVALUATION SHEET Historic Site						
Age 1893 $\pm$ Discovered	Item VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE NARACORTE CAVES		Office 7023-11604				
Period 1883-	Theme  Subject EDUCATION AND CULTURE/Learning /Recreation		Region 6 South East				
Site Type Cave	Boundaries Refer to Map		Status -				
<u>Qualitative Data</u>			Grading				
Component		Comment	E	VG	AG	FP	NA
<u>History</u>							
1. Context:	The Victoria Fossil Cave is an outstanding deposit of vertebrate fossils dating from between 10,000 to 40,000 years ago, and is of world significance because of its condition, extent and diversity.		*				
2. Person/Group:	William Reddan first discovered the Cave in 1894. Cave Exploration Group of S.A. discovered fossil bed.			*			
3. Event:	1897 Named Victoria Cave and opened to the public. 1969 Fossil beds discovered.			*			
<u>Physical Components:</u>							
4. Natural Elements:	A series of chambers and passages through limestone with a variety of natural features, silted cave floor with fossil remains going back 40,000 years.			*			
5. Man-made Elements:	Concrete steps into the Cave, concrete floor and stone retaining walls, internally, back lite lighting displays, archaeological/palaeontology display.			*			
6. Representation:	While the natural features of the Cave are of considerable significance the fossil remains are of natural and possibly world significance, the Cave also represents an illuminated approach towards the presentation of natural features.		*				
<u>Environment</u>							
7. Continuity:	Supportive of the expected atmosphere around the Caves area, by their nature they are not visually accessible from one another.				*		
8. Local Character:	Not applicable.						*
9. Landmark:	Familiar identity in the non-physical nature.			*			

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ITEM EVALUATION SHEET  
Historic Sites

Item VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE  
NARACORTE CAVES

Component

Comment

Grading

E VG AG FP NA

Integrity

10. Alterations Some passages opened up to provide and direct pedestrian access but mostly done sympathetically, alterations done to protect and enhance the appreciation of the natural features.
11. Condition: No obvious faults.
12. Compatibility: Used for controlled tours and research into the fossila.

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Supplementary Information

- Adaptation: Any additional features or changes required should follow the general approach which has been established and should be aware of the non-intervention aspect of its comparison with Blanche Cave.
- Interpretation: The Cave is used for active interpretation but its role in relation to the study of the fossils could receive more attention as to the results being realized. The contrast between the treatment by white man of this natural cave and the other nomination (Blanche Cave) should be pointed out.
- Current Owner: Department of Environment, National Parks & Wildlife Service.

Evaluated By Iris Iwanicki, Register Historian  
Ivar Nelsen, Register Architect

Date

Reviewed By Mark A. Butcher, Register Supervisor

Date

I.E.S./D4/211081



## HISTORICAL RESEARCH REPORT: VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE, NARACOORTE

The Victoria Cave, situated in the Naracoorte Caves Conservation Park, was first discovered by William Reddan in 1894. With European settlement the area was initially under a pastoral lease granted to John Robertson in 1845. The State's first cave tourist attraction, Blanche Cave, was discovered in the area in 1845 and became a popular name for social gatherings by local settlers and a novel attraction for visitors. Guano was also mined from one of the chambers of the Blanche Cave, and following instances of vandalism, the Forest Board appointed a full time Forester to caretake the area in 1885. In 1894 the South Australian government voted funds to search the Reserve area for further caves and guano. William Reddan, appointed Forester-in-charge in 1886, discovered a number of caves, including the Victoria Cave, in the same year. The Victoria Cave was opened for public inspection in 1897.

It was not until 1969, however, that the full significance of the Victoria Cave's physical heritage began to be discovered. In that year, several members of the Cave Exploration Group of S.A. investigated a small flat passage running off the end of the tourist section which had been extended by 3 chambers in 1900. There they found what was to prove the richest vertebrate fossil beds discovered to date in Australia. The deposit of bones date from between 10,000 and 40,000 years ago. Remains of animals trapped in the chamber include the *Zygomaturus* (giant wombat), *Procoptodon* (giant kangaroo about 3m high) and *Thylacoleo* (Cave lion). Undisturbed by the elements, the bed contains a deposit of bones superior to other similar sites in Australia which are generally located in quarry sites and dry lake beds. As a result of the discovery, the Victoria Cave was renamed the Victoria Fossil Cave in 1975. Its contents have been regularly exhumed by paleontologists from the Flinders University, and a National Estate grant was given to fund further work and interpretation. From 1972 members of the public have been able to view the area under investigation and a display of the type of work carried out, together with specimens uncovered, is in situ for the visitors' benefit.

At a local, state and national level the Victoria Fossil Cave's physical heritage significance is to date unique, as no comparable discovery of its kind has occurred in Australia and the World. Apart from the scientific importance of the Cave, the difference in emphasis between the early recreational use of Blanche Cave and the later educative use of Victoria Fossil Cave reflects changing social attitudes towards the country's natural heritage.

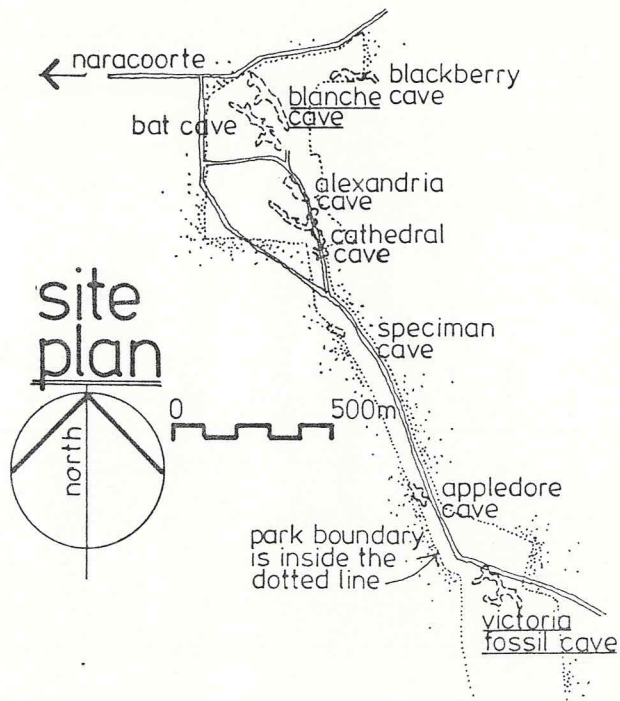
### Sources:

Ian Lewis: Discover Naracoorte Caves, Subterranean Foundation (Aust.) 1977  
Procs. Third Austn. Conf. Cave Tourism & Management, Mt. Gambier, May 1979.  
G. Pilkington: Cave Exploration Group of S.A. Inc.  
Mr. Ellery Hamilton Smith, Consultant, Naracoorte Caves Reserve Draft Management Plan.

Iris Iwanicki  
Register Historian

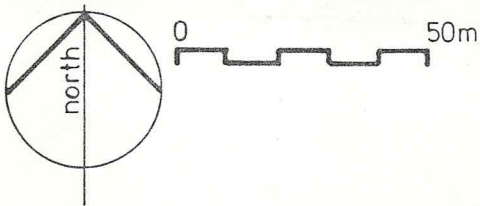
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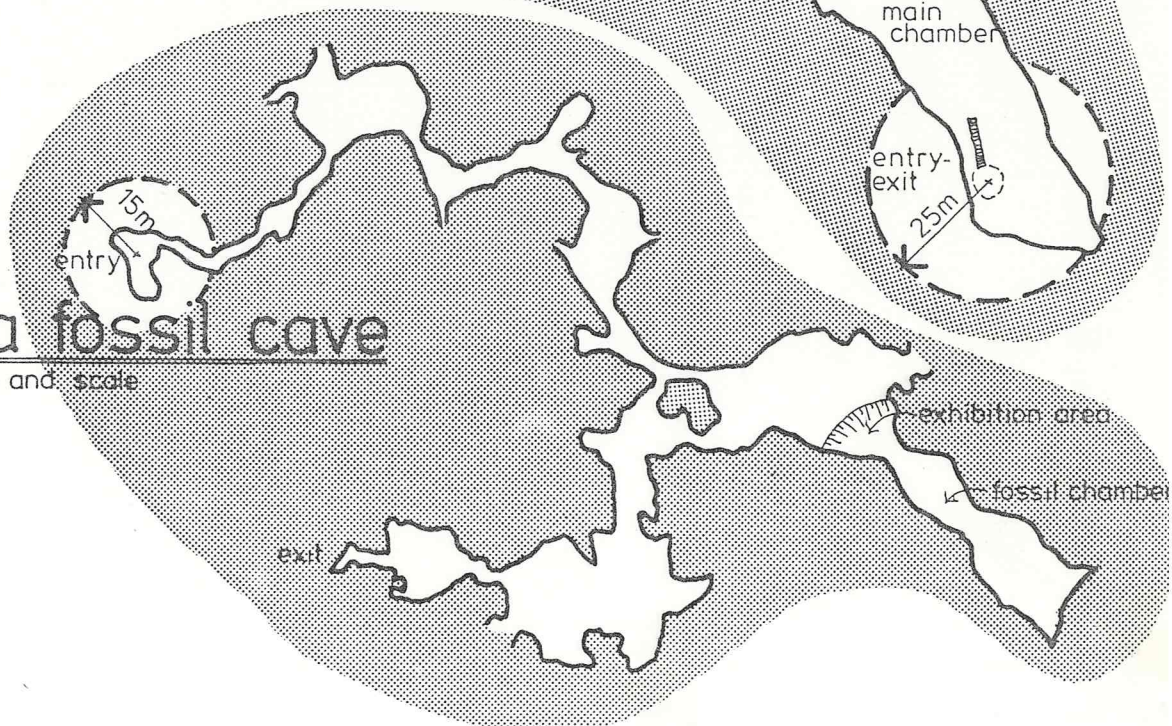
boundary of nominations are within the toned areas, including the surface ground

## blanche cave

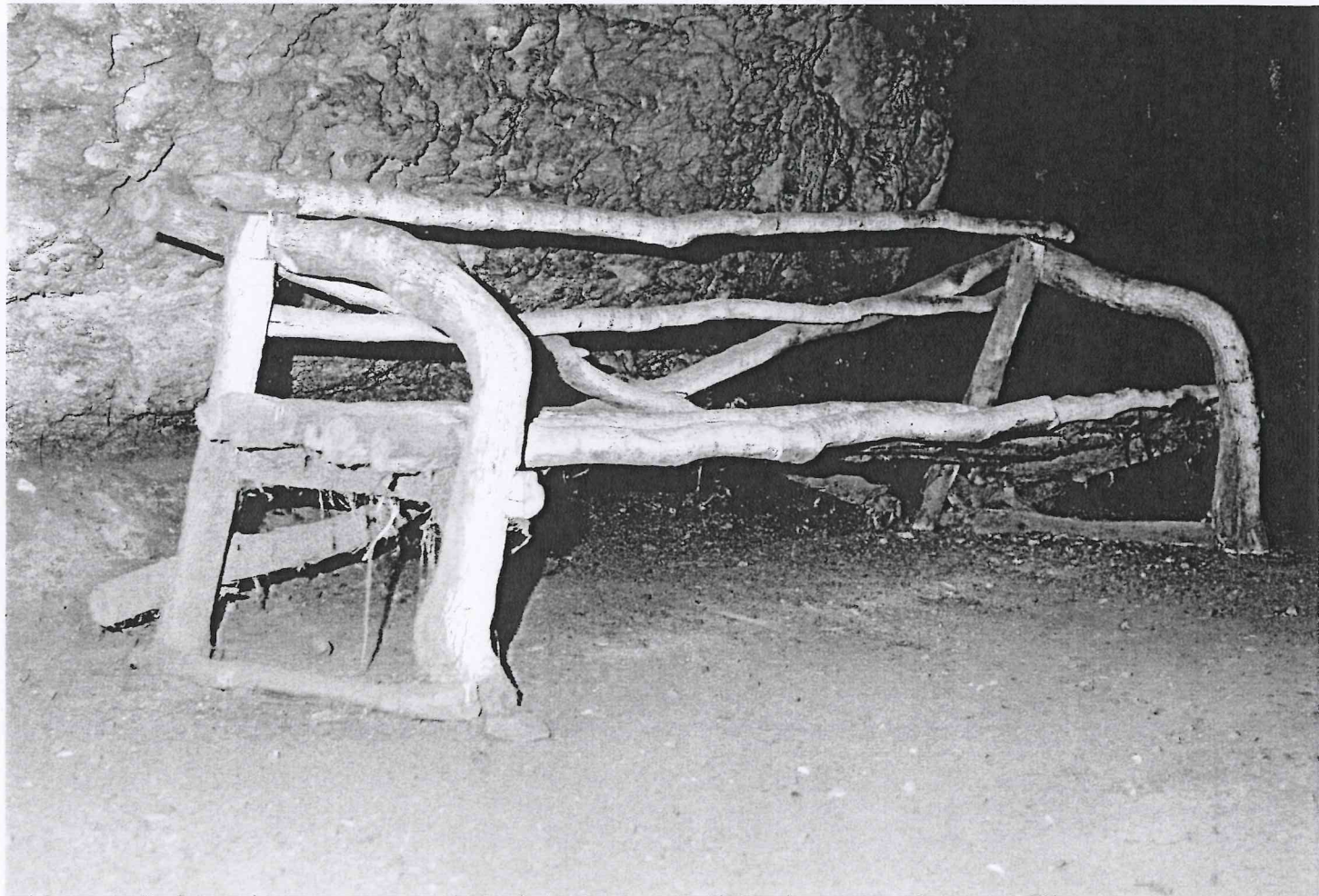


## victoria fossil cave

same orientation and scale







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7024-11604  
 BLANCHE & VICTORIA CAVES  
 - BLANCHE CAVE, SAPLING SEAT

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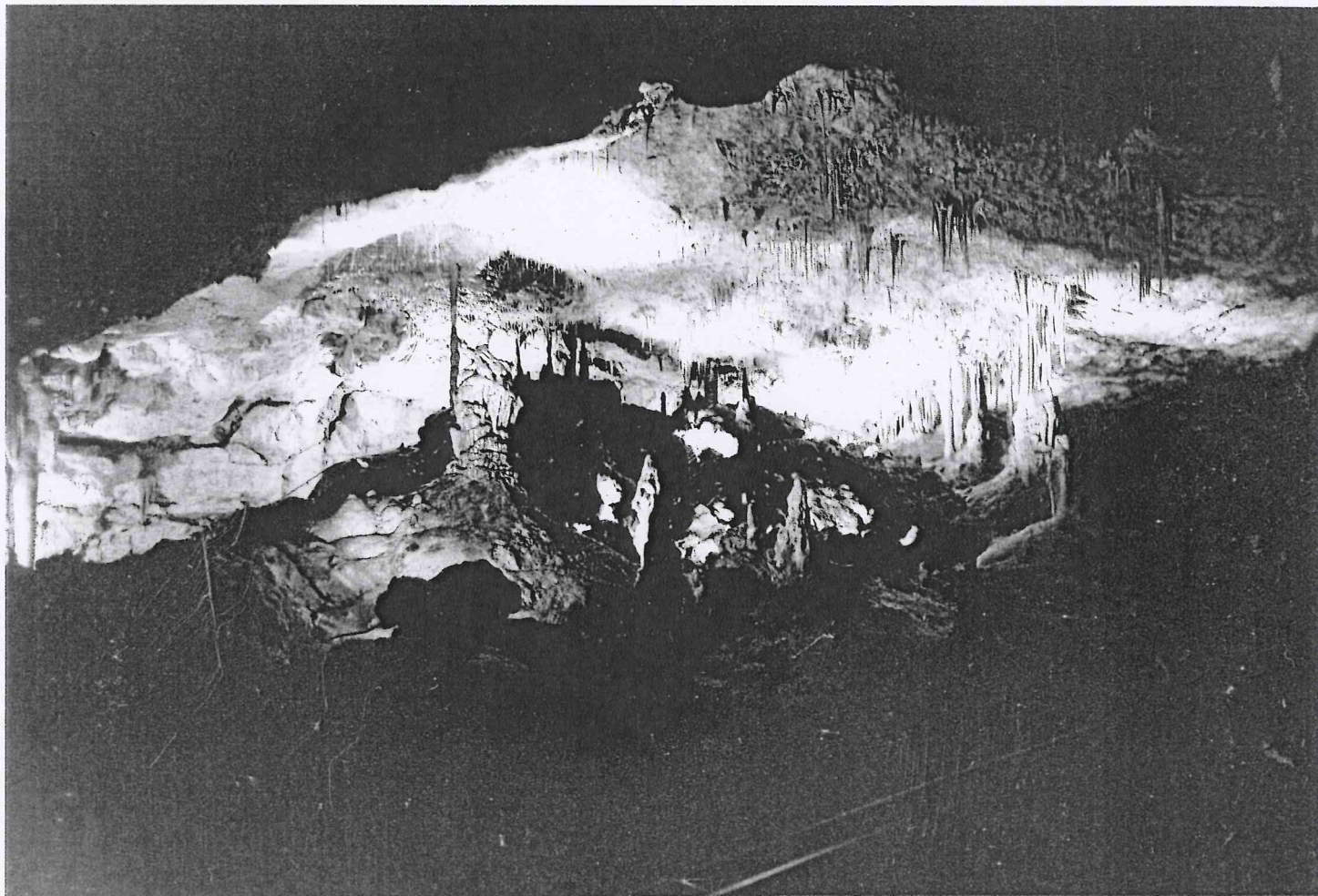


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 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE

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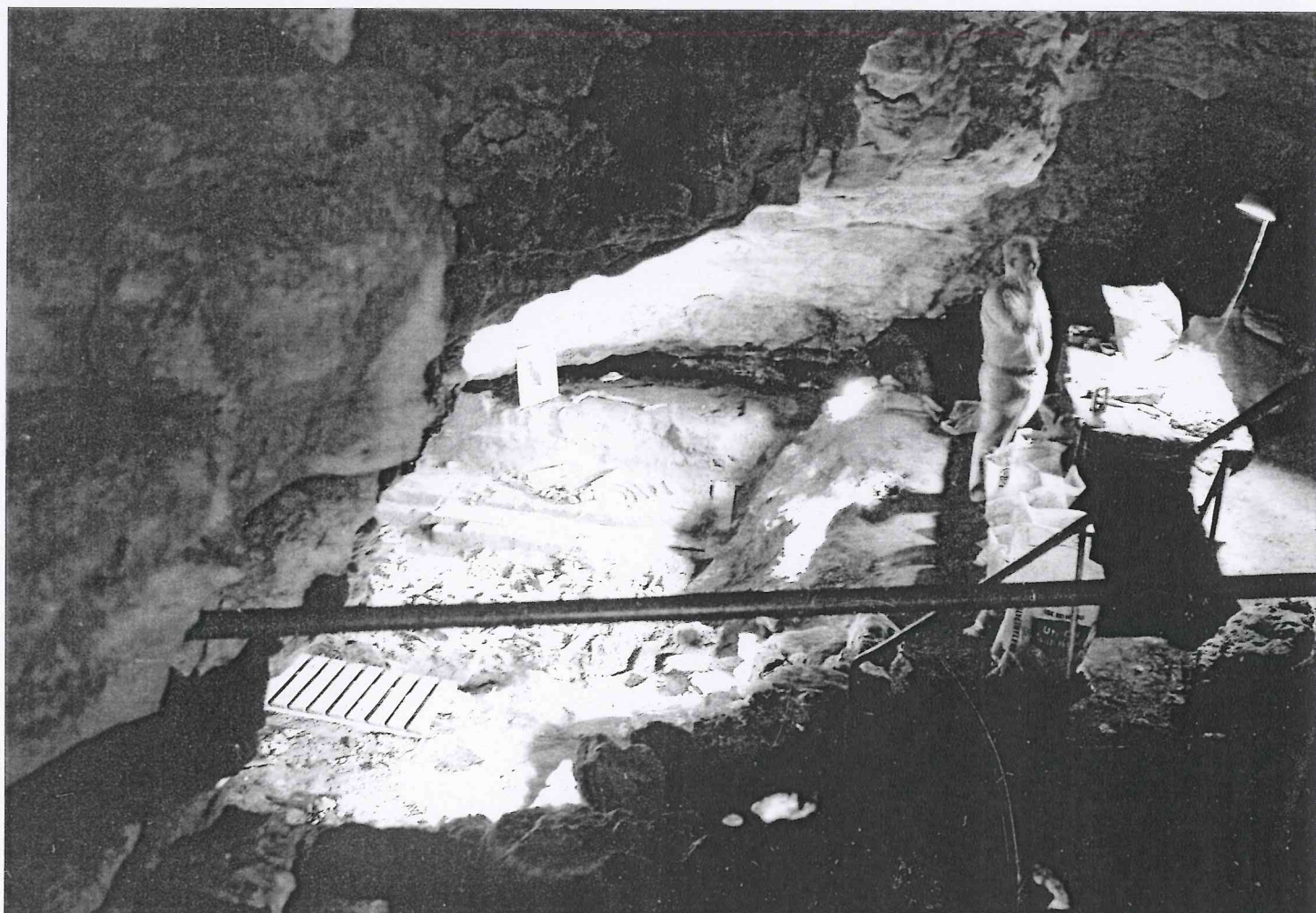


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BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
- VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE



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BLANCHE AND VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
- VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE





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 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE  
 - ENTRANCE TO BLANCHE CAVE

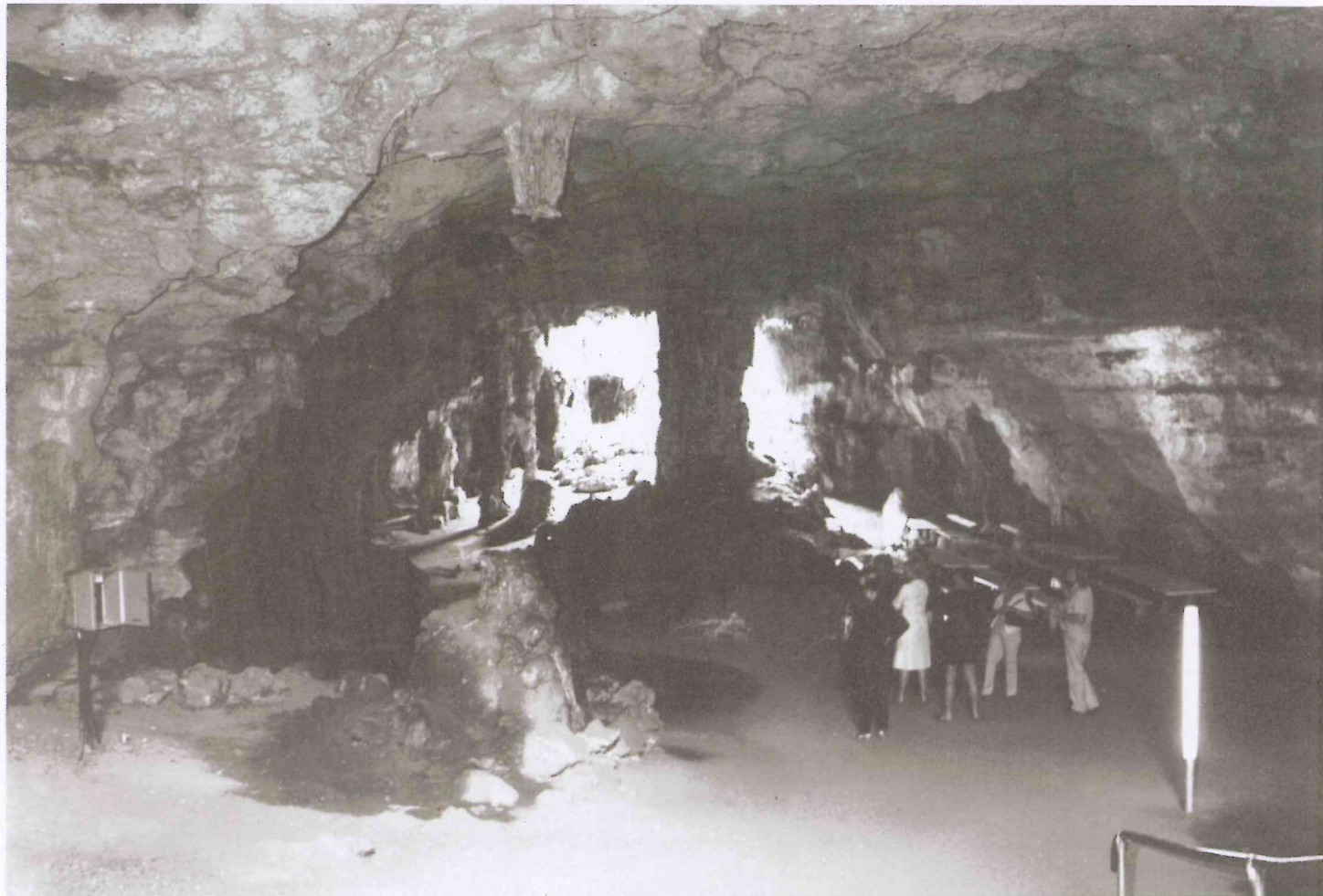
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 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
 - DIGGING FOR BONE FOSSILS

POSTCARD





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7024-11604  
 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
 - BLANCHE CAVE MAIN CHAMBER

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FILM NO.

7024-11604  
 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE  
 - BLANCHE CAVE MAIN CHAMBER





FILM NO.

7024-11604  
 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
 -ENTRANCE STRUCTURE TO BLANCHE CAVE

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7024-11604  
 BLANCHE & VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVES  
 -BLANCHE CAVE. ROOF COLLAPSE

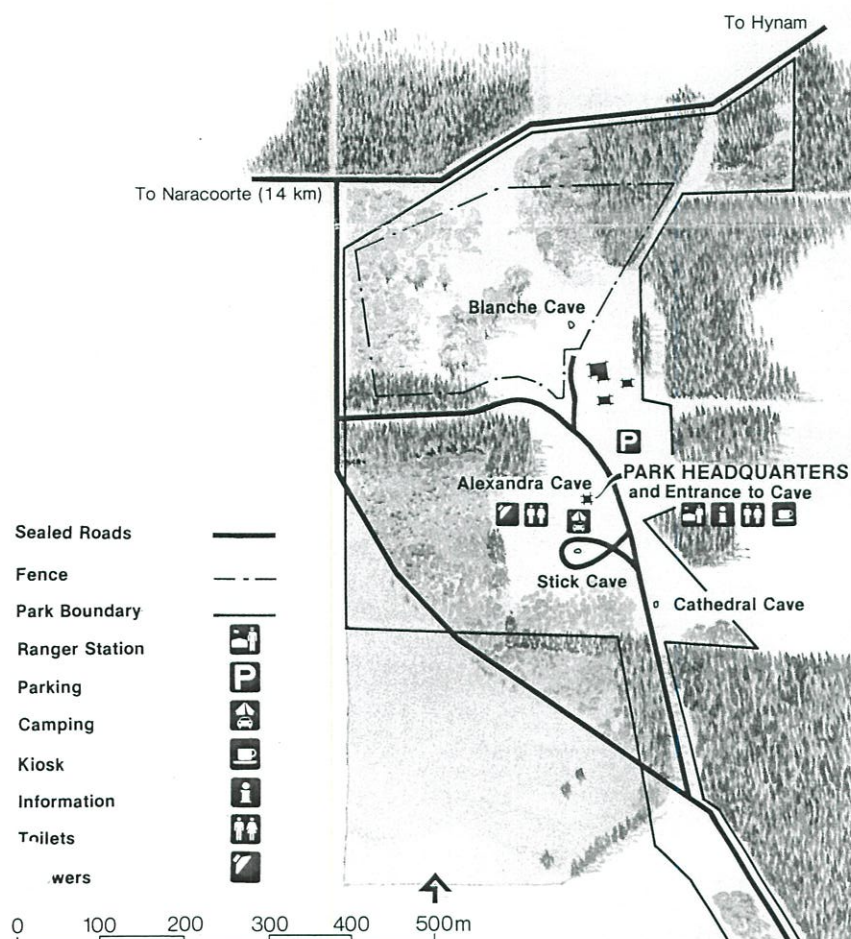
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## Naracoorte Caves Conservation Park

located in a region of marshland and limestone hills in the south-east, is one of South Australia's most significant parks. In caverns beneath Cave Range visitors may view the delicate decorations of calcite or explore fossil caves and the home of the bent wing bat. With the Park's caravan park, kiosk, and picnic area this is an ideal venue for visitors touring the south east.

The Slow Process. With a mild acid of rainwater and carbon dioxide, the limestone rock slowly dissolves to form small droplets of solution on the ceilings of the caves. As the droplets hang for eight to ten hours, carbon dioxide is given off leaving a minute deposit of calcite. Through time the particles build upon each other to form elaborate cave decorations.



### Exploring the Park

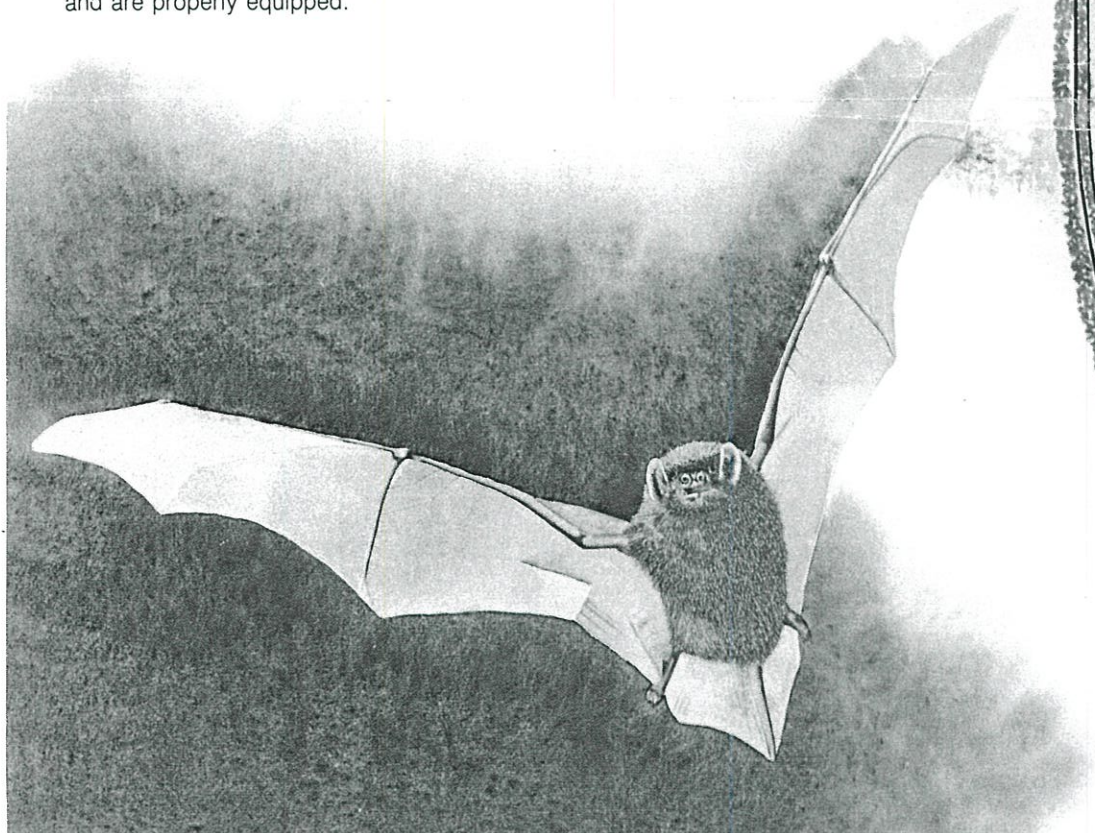
**BLANCHE CAVE:** This dry or 'dormant' cave features three huge chambers each with tall columns. In places, the ceiling has collapsed forming 'roof windows'. After its discovery in the mid 1850's the first chamber was extensively used by the local landowner for lively parties. Wooden seats and benches remain to remind us of that time.

**VICTORIA FOSSIL CAVE:** In 1894 a series of interconnected chambers and galleries of impressive live decorations were discovered. This became known as the Victoria Cave. However, it was not until 1969 that the most scientifically important chamber was found. Explorers from the Cave Exploration Group of S.A. squeezed through a 25 cm high passage into a chamber containing a fossil bed of amazing diversity. The entrance was enlarged to allow visitors to view the progress of a 'dig' where scientists gradually unearth the remains of marsupials and other animals. These remains represent species both extinct, and those still in existence.

**STONY POINT:** South of the main camping area, Mosquito Creek winds through an area of brown stringybark and heath. Along the creek's banks and in lower areas of the Park are the familiar river red gums. This section of the Park has no trails and is often inundated during winter. Bushwalkers wishing to use this region should notify the Park Ranger to ensure that they are familiar with the route and are properly equipped.

Weta in Alexandra Cave

**ALEXANDRA CAVE:** In this wet or 'live' cave the decorations of calcite continue to build elaborate and beautiful shapes. Wetas (cave crickets) cling to the ceilings and walls at openings to the cave.



Every spring, 100's of thousands of bent wing bats migrate from their winter caves around south eastern Australia to caves in the Naracoorte region. Here, they find ideal conditions for breeding and raising their young. Each night at dusk between November and February thousands of bats leave the Maternity Cave to feed on insects. When appropriate, visitors can make prior arrangement with the Ranger, to view the spectacle.