



BRIEF BACKGROUNDS

CAMOOWEAL CAVES

The Camooweal Caves are extensive cavern systems developed beneath the flat surface of the Barkly Tableland in the vicinity of Camooweal township.

The Barkly Tableland consists of flat-lying beds of the Camooweal Dolomite deposited in shallow seas in middle Cambrian times (550 million years ago). The dolomite, composed of calcium-magnesium carbonate, is like limestone soluble in natural waters, and this has led to cave formation along bedding and joint (fracture) planes. Despite the lesser solubility of dolomite in comparison to limestone, and the low rainfall and the subdued relief of the tableland, the density of caves is relatively high, at least in the Camooweal area.

Basically the caves are large, twisting sub-horizontal caverns, often of 'railway tunnel' dimensions, with vertical connections or shafts between levels, and vertical access to the surface through collapsed portions of the roofs (sinkholes or dolines). One known cave has been explored for over 3km of passageways and may extend downwards to permanent lakes at the watertable at about 73m below ground surface.

Because of the lesser solubility of dolomite, the arid climate and destructive seasonal flash flooding, decoration of the caves in the form of stalactites, shawls etc is rare or lacking.

A study of air photographs of the Queensland part of the Barkly Tableland in the 1970s revealed 80 definite and 67 possible sinkholes, with the largest concentration near Camooweal. A number of sinkholes and caves leading off from them have been examined by the University of Queensland Speleological Society.

The Camooweal Caves National Park 8 km south of the town covers the Great Nowranie Cave, Little Nowranie Cave and Five O'Clock Cave. There is a camping area near the cave entrances, but access to the caves is via deep vertical sinkholes and is only possible for people experienced in caving and properly equipped for vertical descents and exits.

The Camooweal Four Mile East Cave and the Niggle Cave are in the Camooweal Town Reserve east of the town. Canellan Cave is in a Pasturage Reserve southwest of the Town and west of the Georgina River

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