

DAMAGE TO CRYSTAL CAVE

Yanchep National Park, Western Australia

- Jay Anderson *

Old postcard of the Elephant's Foot - Crystal Cave



On Saturday 17 February 2006, local speleologists were advised by the Yanchep National Park that there had been a serious break-in to Crystal Cave overnight. Crystal Cave is the primary tourist cave located in close proximity to Perth (45km north). Significant vandalism was reported and the State TV news had an item on the incident. The main damage appears to have occurred in one highly decorated area of the cave. It was also reported that some cave infrastructure including lights and aquatic glass tanks was also damaged. Initially the police forensics was involved and the area was under restricted access. Several local speleologists were involved in the assessment of the damage. The cave was closed for two days, but tours resumed in the cave quite quickly. However there is now a lot of

work to be done in efforts to restore the damaged speleothems. Local speleologists plan to use photographs and visual identification to relocate and restore as many of the damaged speleothems as possible.

The newspapers reported that the *Elephant's Foot* had suffered damage, however the damage was not to the large *Elephant's Foot*, but a smaller stalagmite (referred to by some as 'an' elephant's foot, rather than as 'the' elephant's foot). It is understood that a number of broken speleothems are still with the police as part of the evidence of the crime. It is reported that the police have charged several individuals over the event, however there is yet to be a finalization or outcome of the court process. It is understood that charges occurred under several WA Statutes - the Criminal Code, Heritage Act and the CALM Act and that the maximum possible sentence would be a 3 year jail term. The Western Australian community has a combination of shock and outrage at the vandalism and local community members have volunteered to assist with the restoration project.

* Jay Anderson is President of the Australian Speleological Federation, and an ACKMA member.

Below: Press cutting from 'North Coast Times' - 23 February 2006

Destruction in the Crystal Cave

JOONDALUP detectives are continuing to investigate a senseless vandalism attack of the Crystal Cave in Yanchep National Park on February 19.

Vandals broke into the park's cave and destroyed and damaged stalagmites which had been formed over thousands of years.

Cave experts were particularly concerned about the damage caused to a stalactite formation called the Elephant's Foot, which is extremely big and very old.

Police spokesman Eamon Flanagan said forensic officers were working closely with officers from Conservation and Land Management to try to work out who was responsible for the attacks.

"We have done DNA swabs and taken fingerprints from the scene so we are now waiting for the results," Sen Const Flanagan said.

Apart from the ongoing investigation involving forensic evidence, police are also urging members of the public with information to come forward.

"We have already received some information but we are still appealing for information about this incident," he said.

Speleologists and conservation staff worked tirelessly collecting formation fragments that had been broken off so the cave could be reopened as quickly as possible.

A small area has been roped off to visitors but the cave itself was reopened on Monday, two days after the vandalism attack.

A cave guide who was preparing for a tour on Saturday morning first discovered the damage at the cave, which is one of 600 in the national park.

Apart from the damage to the cave, a small office building was also broken into at the park and the caged entrance to the cave had been forced open.

Anyone with information about the incident has been asked to call Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

CALM officer Sherylee Randall assesses damage caused by vandals at the Crystal Cave. Picture: Bruce Hunt