

From: Simon Keenan <Simon.Keenan@daa.wa.gov.au>

Subject: RE: Weebubbie Cave

Date: 10 July 2013 5:59:09 PM AEST

To: John Vanderleest <johnvanderleest@me.com>

Dear John

Thank you for email relating to proposed camping which will occur within Aboriginal heritage site DAA 3066 (Weebubbie Cave). I have reviewed the information we have on file and provide the following comment.

The Aboriginal heritage values of the cave itself appear to relate to the discovery of limestone picks within the cave, stone cairns utilised in the mining process, fire sticks and hidden caches of flint cores. This has allowed archaeologists to gain an insight into (the very rare) practice of underground mining (or extraction of stone) as conducted by traditional Aboriginal peoples.

Anthropologist Daisy Bates commented in the 1920s that the Cave was also associated with sourcing fresh water and used as a storehouse for sacred objects. The cave was associated with a particular dangerous spirit and only Aboriginal male Elders were said to access the cave. It is unknown whether the cave is still considered to be associated with this narrative by contemporary Aboriginal people. The relevant native title claim for the area is the WA Mirning People and this claim is managed by the Goldfields Land and Sea Council. It is possible they may be able to better advise the contemporary cultural significance Aboriginal people accord the cave.

Essentially, the Aboriginal heritage values associated with the cave appear to be restricted to the subterranean level of the cave and not the surface. As such, I do not think that camping in the vicinity of the cave will impact on the cave's Aboriginal heritage values - obviously we would hope that the camping activity will leave the land surface as found.

We have not an archaeologist visit this cave for some time now and are unaware of whether the physical archaeological remains which give the cave its heritage significance still remain in an in situ location. As such, we would encourage any divers to be very careful with respect to ensuring that nothing is removed from the cave (i.e. the stone and wooden implements referred to above) to ensure that the current Aboriginal heritage values of the cave remain consistent.

Please contact me should you have further queries regarding this matter.

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-----Original Message-----

From: John Vanderleest [mailto:johnvanderleest@me.com]

Sent: Tuesday, 9 July 2013 3:26 PM

To: Simon Keenan

Subject: Weebubbie Cave

Dear Simon

As briefly mentioned on the phone, I am the National Director from the Cave Divers Association of Australia and am writing you in relation to camping beside or near Weebubbie Cave.

Weebubbie Cave is located approximately 20km north of Eucla near the South Australian Border. I have attached a Google Earth link below for your reference.

The cave contains a permanent potable water supply and I understand is of cultural value to the local indigenous population.

The site is also a very popular location for cave divers to explore the sub aquatic regions of the cave.

The Cave Divers Association of Australia has been accessing this site for some 30plus years. Access permission is done through the Department of Regional Development and Lands, WA. I understand that the land itself is still listed as unallocated crown land.

While access permission is obtained from the DRE, controls are jointly managed, with the Cave Divers Association ensuring the qualifications of divers, completion of crown solicitor indemnities and informing local police of our presence in the area.

In discussing camping at or near the cave, the DRE was unclear whether camping would also be something of interest to your Department. For other caves in the region, it is not a problem, but the other caves do not contain potable water and not considered sites that are known to or could have significance.

Today, access into the cave is no longer safely possible without the aid of ropes and ladders. To this end, our members would normally create temporary rigging to lower and lift dive equipment and safety ropes and ladders for people. This is quite a normal practices for cave divers wishing to access caves. However, doing so takes a long time and once rigged is left assembled for the duration of the trip (normally around 5 to 7 days).

Because the site is now physically accessible, leaving the site unattended carries risk. Hence, our members have always preferred to camp at the site during their trips.

While this has been happening for some 30 plus years, nobody has ever asked whether camping is of concern to your Department or the local indigenous population. It was always assumed that permission to enter the cave also included camping at or near the cave.

My ask is whether camping at or near the cave is of concern or needs noting by your Department. If so, would it be possible to the Cave Divers Association of Australia to be granted permission for a defined camping area at or near Weebubbie Cave so to ensure security of the site while diving operations are in progress.

I look forward to your reply.

Kindest Regards

John Vanderleest
National Director, Cave Divers Association of Australia
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