

# Global Geotourism Perspectives

4

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## **Caves and Karst Geotourism in Australia**

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# 4

## Caves and Karst Geotourism in Australia

**Jay Anderson**

Australia contains an amazing diversity of caves. These sensitive sites are special features within a landscape referred to as 'karst'. Although, not all caves are in limestone, the vast majority of caves are situated in limestone areas. Caves are an important part of a distinctive geological landscape, which requires integrated and holistic management. This chapter will describe the key karst areas in Australia.

Karst sites have a particular use in tourism and human recreation. In particular, national parks have played an important role both in tourism and the protection and preservation of sites. The management of karst is complex, due to its nature interactions. This chapter will also outline the current status of geotourism in relation to Australian cave and karst areas, highlighting current challenges and areas of opportunity.

The chapter also highlights the use of interpretation for visitor education and within geotourism. It is well known that humans use caves for recreation, yet caves also have significant values that need to be conserved and protected. It can be a complex balance between management of a site for its natural values versus the impacts caused by tourism and human visitation. The role of educational and adventure tourism as components of geotourism is therefore considered. Visitors to caves may be tourists, school students, casual visitors or speleologists. In many areas, there are important partnerships between community volunteers and land managers to ensure that sensitive sites are appropriately managed. Speleologists and community volunteers assist with particular management techniques that enable such natural sites to be maintained as accessible sites for human visitation and enjoyment.

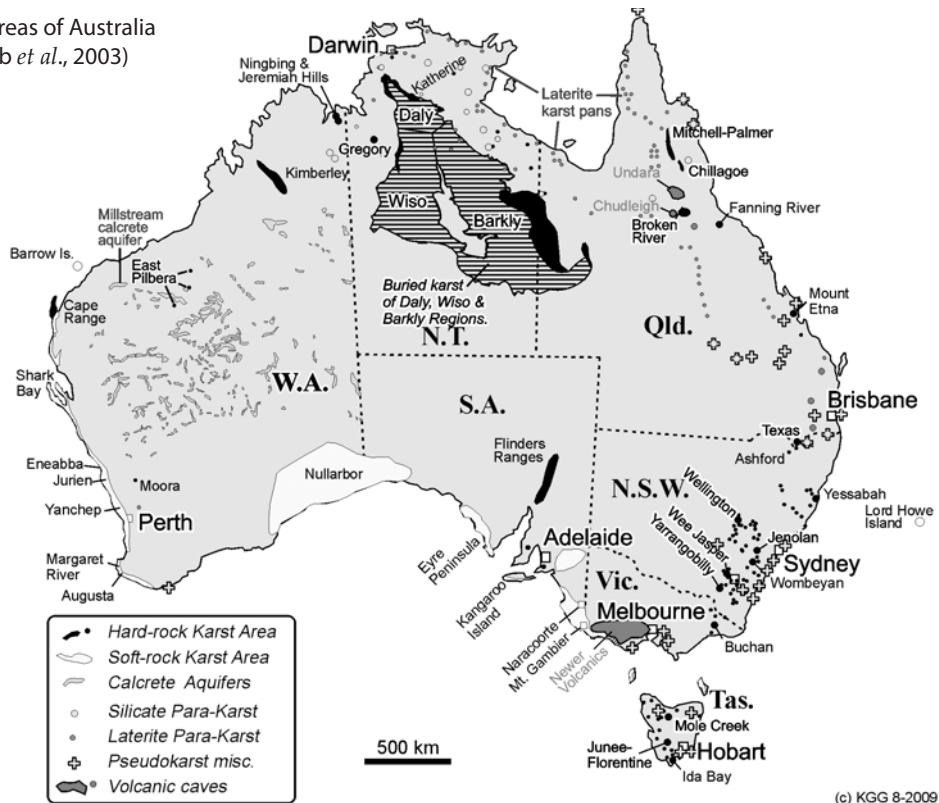
### Background

Caves and karst are special environments. The term 'karst' is used to describe landscapes and features formed by solutional processes. Caves are a significant component of what is referred to as the 'earth's geodiversity' (Gray, 2004). There has been considerable debate regarding the term 'geological diversity', however,

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a consensus of authors agree that it is the range of geological features, geomorphological processes and soil features. However, geodiversity also encompasses 'relationships, properties, interpretations and systems' (Gray, 2004) and 'links between people, landscapes and culture' (Stanley, 2001). Karst environments clearly demonstrate a range of unique interconnections and interrelationships – particularly between the surface and the subsurface, and with a key component (water). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidelines for cave and karst protection state that 'karst landscapes represent an important facet of the Earth's geodiversity, and one of major management significance' (Watson *et al.*, 1997: 3).

**Figure 4.1:** Karst areas of Australia  
(derived from Webb *et al.*, 2003)



Australia contains a wide range of distinctive geology, and numerous significant karst areas (Figure 4.1). Each karst area, from the Kimberley and Chillagoe in the north, to Cape Range in the west, from Yanchep, Yallingup and Augusta in the south, through to the Nullarbor and Naracoorte (SA) (southern middle) to the far south (Tasmania – Hastings, Mole Creek) and then to the East – Jenolan, Wombeyan, Wellington, and Buchan, to name a few of the key tourism areas – all these sites are diverse and exhibit unique geologic attributes and numerous individual values. Each karst area has its own history, interesting geology and diversity of geological formations. These special places occur within a wide

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