

Byaduk Caves:

Location: Turn east off the Hamilton–Port Fairy Rd at the Byaduk Caves Rd signpost, 0.5 km north of North Byaduk.

Landform and geology: The long lava flow from the volcanic eruption that ran down the Harman Valley was fed by lava tubes that continued to carry liquid lava after the surface cooled to a solid crust. A 1.5 km loop walking trail, with interpretative signs, leads you past several large collapse holes that give views down into the caves; (pictured below, DL). However, entry involves ropes for all but Harman 1 Cave and movement inside requires scrambling over large slippery boulders in the dark. Enjoy a visit into the entrance of Harman 1 Cave but leave the rest to experienced cavers.



There is a well preserved dry stone wall on the northern boundary and an old sheep croft on the south side of the valley.

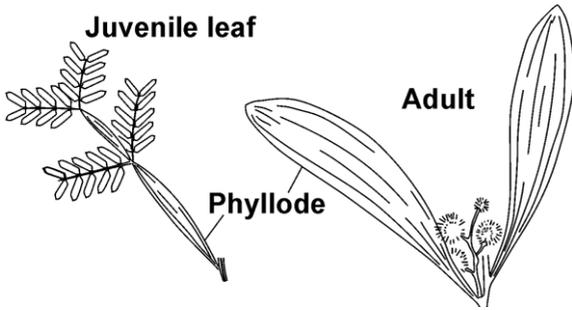
Flora: The surface is stony rises with shallow soil on the lava flow that prevents the growth of Manna Gums, so the main trees seen are Black Wattle

and Blackwood. The sinkholes have a distinctive moist vegetation. You will see Shiny Cassinia and Kangaroo Apple, curtains of Nodding Saltbush and a wealth of ferns. Most of these caves once had Soft Tree Ferns but home gardeners removed them from all but one cave, where they still survive. Some 20 species of ferns have been found in the sinkholes. They include Sickle Fern, Soft Water-fern, Batwing Fern, Mother Shield-fern, Kangaroo Fern, Common Maidenhair, Austral Bracken and Mother and Common Spleenworts. Trampling severely damages the ferns and prevents them from re-establishing, so be careful where you walk!

Fauna: Small colonies of Southern Bent-wing Bats occupy some of the caves. Do not light fires in the caves because this will disperse the bats and, in winter, may result in their death.

Sub-fossil remains of many animals (some now extinct) were found in the caves, some bodies having been taken there by predators (owls and Spot-tailed Quolls). Other larger remains, including Common Wombat, may have been washed in. One skull found by a member of HFNC, the late Lionel Elmore, showed that Brush-tailed Rock-wallabies once lived there too.

Tiger Snakes are quite common in both the sinkholes and on the surface and may often be seen sunning themselves. Grey Kangaroos and feral goats are commonly seen.



Blackwood showing juvenile and adult foliage (KG)