

# Hastings Cave and Thermal Springs



## Teachers Fact Sheet No 1 Newdegate Cave – a look into the recent past

### Early history

In the past, Tasmanian Aboriginals were known to have lived in the Hastings area, but there has been no evidence yet discovered to indicate that they inhabited the caves.

### European discovery

In late November 1917 a gang of tree fellers from the Hastings Mill – Perc Lockley, Barney and Lubby Hudson and Joe Ford – were climbing a steep bank on the northern rim of the Lune Plain to fell a stand of trees when they stumbled upon a cave entrance.

They went a short distance into the cave, but owing to the lack of light they could go no further. Returning the next day accompanied by Fred Escourt, the Hastings Bush Manager, and armed with axes, lanterns and ropes, they constructed ladders from poles cut from the surrounding bush and began the exploration of the cave.

At the time of the discovery a landowner from Southport, David Inns was applying for a mineral lease of 320 acres, which included Newdegate Cave, for proposed prospecting for bauxite.

David Inns named the cave for Sir Francis Newdigate Newdegate, who was Governor of Tasmania from 1917 to 1922. David Inns also named two nearby caves, King George (after the King of England of the day) and Beattie's (after John Watt Beattie, the well known Hobart photographer).



Tree felling, Geeveston Forest 1911–1915  
Photo: National Library of Australia



Newdegate Cave Entrance  
Photograph taken by JW Beattie, 23 February 1918

### Conservation and development

Through the concerted efforts of Evelyn T Emmett (Director, Government Tourist Bureau), John Watt Beattie (Government Photographer and conservationist and the Esperance Council, the State Government in 1919 declared 109.8 hectares around and including Newdegate Cave, to be a Cave Reserve.

Once the general public became aware of the discovery of Newdegate Cave, local entrepreneurs began guiding trips into the cave.

Fred Escourt – the former bush manager for the Hastings Mill, Amos Wolf, Eck Smith and George Aird were some of the locals who led these guided trips.

With the crash of the international stock market, a worldwide depression ensued and unemployment became a national problem.

The state governments responded by introducing programs whereby unemployed people were given paid work, mainly on construction projects. The

developments at Newdegate Cave and the Thermal Pool were completed under this scheme, as was the construction of the road to the Pinnacle of Mount Wellington near Hobart.

Construction of the road to Newdegate Cave began in 1934, with the employees camping on the road as they constructed it. The Esperance Council originally hoped that the road would reach the top of Adamson's Peak but, due to lack of finances, the road was not continued beyond Newdegate Caves.

In 1937 work began on the internal infrastructure of Newdegate Cave, including building of the walkway, timber staircases in the rear of the cave and the installation of electric lighting.

The electrician from Jenolan Caves in New South Wales, D Lowry, was employed to design and supervise the installation of the electrical lighting, which was to be powered by a generator located near the cave car park.

Sir Alan Knight reportedly designed the concrete spiral staircase leading down into the main chambers of Newdegate Cave. Sir Alan also designed and patented the floating concrete bridge that spanned the River Derwent in Hobart for many years.

On 19 January 1939 the Premier of Tasmania, Angus Ogilvie, officially opened Newdegate Tourist Cave.

A full survey of Newdegate Cave has never been completed but in 1946, with the assistance of the Government



*Construction of the road between the Thermal Pool and Newdegate Cave*

*Motor Tours - - - - Tasmania*

in Castle Forbes Bay, Shipwright's Point, Geeveston and Surges Bay. After leaving Surges Bay, Dover is reached at 50 miles from Hobart, and the road leads South again to Hastings and Hythe. Points of particular interest are the Hastings Caves and Hot Springs.

*Extract from SHELL Motor Tours map, Tasmanian Manual, 1936*

Tourist Bureau, the newly formed Tasmanian Caverneering Club commenced a partial survey.

Since then, the facilities in the cave have been steadily upgraded with the construction of new bridges and access pathways, and a new entrance assembly area. The Thermal Pool was upgraded with a new pool and water-treatment plant, along with the changing rooms and amenities, barbecues and trails in 2010.

The Thermal Pool area has also been upgraded over the years, with a new pool and water-treatment plant, changing rooms and toilets, barbecues and trails, and was most recently refurbished in 2010.