



A RATIONALE FOR THE PROTECTION OF VOLCANIC CAVES

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Abstract

On an international scale, the protection of volcanic caves is extremely limited. Whilst it is true that some of the world's most important caves lie within internationally-recognised protected areas, many others do not, and even in the protected areas there is scant evidence of any specifically-directed conservation management policies. One important handicap to the protection of these features is the lower priority generally applied to geological conservation. Another is poor perception, there being a common view among conservation managers and their geological advisors that volcanic caves are inconsequential landforms, ranking of minor importance or merely as curiosities.

This paper lays out the case that volcanic caves have important scientific, economic, cultural and aesthetic values and are important, both as landforms in their own right, and as a part of a wider assemblage of volcanic landforms. Existing protective designations will be reviewed and justifications for protection of these remarkable features laid out. A point of debate will be the extent to which the world's volcanic cave estate is under threat and whether or not this justifies the development of protective guidelines. Such guidelines might follow the model of the IUCN's Guidelines for Cave and Karst Protection, and could be approached either by including volcanic caves within the remit of that document (speleological approach), or by considering them as a member of the wider assemblage of landforms that constitute particular volcanic terrains (volcanological approach).