

# EDITORIAL

Steve Bourne

The ACKMA AGM at Te Anau is almost upon us as I write this, with Neil informing me that 60 members have registered. This is about the same number as attended the Naracoorte Conference in 2016 and once again shows value in holding ACKMA AGMs in locations where fewer members have been before. I am sure many members are extending their visit to Te Anau and enjoying South Island, New Zealand scenery. I unfortunately won't be one of them due to work commitments. I say work commitments, but have a busy schedule of other cave commitments; UIS post congress excursion, and trips to Nullarbor and Tasmania planned for later in the year. There is an expectation that one spends some time at the work site.

I hosted ACKMA member Greg Middleton and Julian Hume, palaeontologist with the Natural History Museum of London, in February. Together we have shared a few adventures; Mauritius, Rodrigues, Madagascar, South Africa and a few Australian locations. Julian's speciality is extinct island birds and his interest on this trip was island emus. He and Greg visited King and Flinders Islands before I joined them and we visited Kangaroo Island. ACKMA members Nick Heath and Matt Cooper led a trip into the back sections of Kelly Hill Cave, to chambers called Woop Woop and Back of Woop Woop. There were a few emu bones to get Julian excited by an excavation undertaken by Matt McDowell of Flinders University. The real surprise was finding a bird skeleton in the ceiling of the cave. Kelly Hill is aeolian limestone and presumably this bird died in a sand dune, and as this consolidated into a limestone (I use this term loosely as parts of this cave still feel like you are caving in a sand dune) and as the cave formed, the skeleton was exposed.

This cave is well track-marked, has good cleaning stations and has a very low number of visits allowed under permit. It is an extraordinarily well decorated cave.

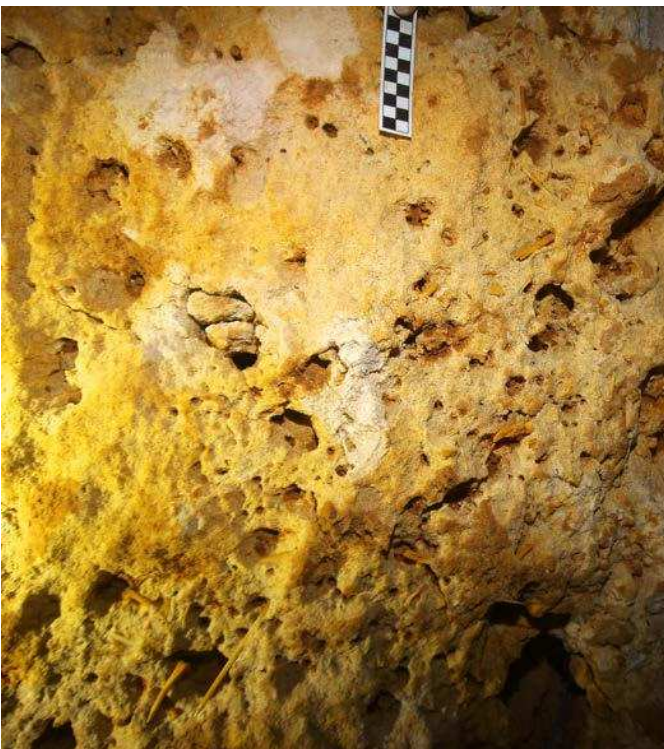


*Close up of bird beak and limb bones of a bird skeleton in the ceiling of Kelly Hill Cave  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

On the topic of finds in caves, cave divers recently found an articulated snake skeleton in Tank Cave, near Mount Gambier in South Australia. The skeleton was located in an undisturbed in a section 650m from the current closest entry point. Part of the skeleton is encased by the clay and sediment. Cave diver Toby Passeur provided images to palaeontologist Liz Reed with the hope of an identification, which is extremely difficult with snakes unless cranial elements are available. It seems likely that it is an Eastern Brown Snake given it is about 1.6m long. It is great to see finds like these. The fact that the cave has undisturbed sections preserving such interesting material.



*Snake skeleton in Tank Cave, Mount Gambier  
Photo: Toby Passeur*



*Bird skeleton in the ceiling of Kelly Hill Cave, Kangaroo Island  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

Some good news for Wellington Caves with the newly amalgamated Council, Dubbo Regional Council, endorsing the allocation of \$9 million provided to the new Council from the NSW Stronger Communities Fund to 10 major projects to kick start new developments in Dubbo, Wellington and surrounding villages. Of interest for ACKMA members is the \$2,500,000 allocated for the "Wellington Caves Visitor Experience Centre". Wellington Caves was also in the news after upgrading its megafauna models last year as well. Manager Jodie Anderson now has the enviable task of implementing this project. The media release included some figures on the value of Wellington Caves to the local economy, and I quote;



*"Projects such as the Wellington Caves Visitor Experience Centre have great potential to add to the visitor economy," Mr Kneipp said.*

*"A 15% increase in annual visitor numbers at the Wellington Caves has the potential to generate 5 additional jobs and contribute some \$855,000 to the local economy through salaries and visitor expenditure."*

A Flinders University team led by Gavin Prideaux, has been excavating in Cathedral Cave at Wellington. Their excavation and the interpretation of their finds will no doubt form an important part of the new visitor centre.



*Manager of the Wellington Caves complex Jodie Anderson and Australian Museum preparator Tina Manssion with the partially refurbished Wonambi - a model of a giant python, part of the trio of megafauna models on show at the central west NSW attraction.*

ABC: Sally Bryant

ACKMA Life Member Kent Henderson recently advised me that he met up with ACKMA Fellow Neil Kell during a brief visit Neil made to Melbourne early in February. They enjoyed an expansive lunch at The Australian Club and reminisced over their nearly 30 year association in caves. Neil finally retired from Yarrangobilly about a year ago.



*Kent Henderson (left) and Neil Kell in front of the National Gallery of Victoria.*

Photo: Kent Henderson

Andy Spate prepared a submission regarding the nomination of to the Cliefden Caves to the New South Wales State Heritage Register, submitted under Dale Calnin's signature as president of ACKMA. Advocacy is a critical role of ACKMA and I can recall submissions to the British Columbian and Tasmanian Governments as well as the two mentioned in this edition.

White-nose Syndrome, *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* is a serious concern for the Australasian caving community, with a sharp focus as the International Speleological Congress approaches in July. The Australian Speleological Federation is taking the risk very seriously and has produced a protocol and guidelines (published in this journal). This gained some serious media attention, when I did an interview on the topic with the local ABC radio, and suggested that they also speak to Nicholas White, ACKMA and ASF member, who is taking a lead role in biosecurity for the congress. The story was quickly picked up on Facebook, Twitter and email lists and has (hopefully) ensured everyone in caves is thinking about this risk and on alert to the threat of white-nose syndrome poses risk to Australian bat populations.

A report was prepared for Wildlife Health Australia titled *"Qualitative risk assessment: White-nose syndrome in bats in Australia"* by Holz et al. It has been distributed via the ACKMA email list and it is certainly worth reading. The authors conclude *that the likelihood of White-nose syndrome entering Australia as almost certain to occur at least once in the next 10 years and the likelihood of the entry leading to exposure as being likely*, leading to an overall likely assessment of entry and exposure of **likely**. This all sounds quite disastrous, but in my work role I have been participating in workshops regarding Foot and Mouth Disease in livestock. Those monitoring this suggest this disease reaches Australia every week through international airports, but through strict quarantine measures and perhaps a good dose of luck, has yet to take hold. The distribution range of the critically endangered Southern Bent-winged Bat falls entirely within the latitude and cave conditions that this fungus prefers, so would potentially have a devastating effect on a species already under severe pressure. Liz Reed and I are hosting an excursion to Naracoorte Caves post International Speleological Congress and are taking every step to ensure no contaminated equipment or clothing comes near the caves.

This journal once again has a diversity of articles from our mostly regular contributors. There is so much happening at Australasian caves at present it would be good to have more members hit the keyboards. Ann Augusteyn provides a summary of the Savannah Guides workshop held recently. The Capricorn Caves' commitment to self development with organisational support is outstanding and its a safe bet that they will be once again well represented at Te Anau. Kent Henderson has provided a very interesting third part to his Philippine adventures with the promise of more to come.

ACKMA provided a submission to the Paparoa National Park Management Plan, largely due to the efforts of ACKMA member Mary Trayes. Mary summarises this input in her update on the plan. Cathie Plowman instigated crowd-funding to support two international students to the ISC and reveals the lucky participants. Liz Reed continues her historical investigations on Naracoorte Caves with an article on Cathedral Cave. *Trove* is a resource that holds so much information on Australian cave history and I hope others might investigate and publish on other cave sites. Graham Parkes, well known in Buchan Caves' circles, was awarded the Australia Day Public Service Medal, and Dale Calnin summarises his award. Andy Spate has provided a huge *Andysez*, dedicated to Ken Grimes. This *Andysez* is about karren, something Ken was passionate about and taught so many people (including me) during the Karst Management Course that Charles Sturt University ran. This journal is a good read, I hope you enjoy, and look forward to more contributions from new authors.