

Vale Ann Augusteyn

By Jordan Wheeler

Ann Augusteyn was born in Halesworth, a small town in England, to Leslie and Marjorie Copping. Her life was simple, growing up in a country town during the post-war era. Throughout her childhood she showed great sporting prowess and represented her county in hockey and tennis. Ann was also a very diligent student and achieved academic excellence through hard work and dedication, a trait that continued throughout her life. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and completed a Certificate in Education before commencing a new life abroad where she met the love of her life, Ken. Together they worked, Ann as a teacher and Ken as a foreman on a gas plant, and travelled extensively throughout Canada and Europe - followed, eventually, by marrying in England in 1971 before moving to Australia in 1973. Ann was the very proud mother of 3 children, John, Robert and Helen and grandmother to Katie, Jade, Jake, Riley and Elise.

In June 1988, an article appeared in the Courier Mail that Batman was selling his caves in Rockhampton. This was the year Brisbane hosted the World Expo and the people of Queensland were looking for new adventures. The advertorial caught the attention of a young Augusteyn family. Ann, a high school history teacher and her husband Ken, now a plumber, seeking a new challenge - packed their whole world up into a car and drove north for Rockhampton to take over the only privately-owned show caves on freehold land in Australia. Ann and Ken knew nothing about tourism and even less about caves, but they had energy, determination and, with Ken's skill set across all trades, they had what it took to make a mark on the industry.

The local community was initially apprehensive that someone "from the city" had bought the caves and wondered what the future was for Olsen's Caves. That did not deter Ann and her family. They were determined to execute a plan to make the caves a premier tourist attraction. Ken began working on the infrastructure of the property while Ann took on everything else. She did the marketing, ticket sales, cleaning and to top that off was the sole tour guide.



**Ann and Andy Spate at the 2011 ACKMA Conference
Ulverstone (John Brush)**

For the next 20 years, they focussed on the development of the property. Their business plan was to generate enough income to reinvest in maintenance, new facilities, conservation and sharing the natural wonder with the world.

These achievements had made Ken and Ann very proud, however nothing more so than making Capricorn Caves wheelchair accessible. In 1992, carrying in 6 tonnes of timber and 3 tonnes of steel, they worked to minimise impact on the caves and maximise views for visitors, becoming the most accessible cave in Australia.

Ken's health declined after years of hard work and, in March 2008, he was pushed up the ramp that he had constructed to attend his son John's wedding in the Cathedral Cave. Ten days later, he passed away leaving behind a remarkable legacy and a tourist operation completely in Ann's hands.

From this point, Ann never took a backward step - she became a community leader and well respected within the local tourism industry, developing Capricorn Caves into, not only a leading show cave, but also one of the leading tourist attractions in the country.



**Ann (left) with Capricorn staff at the 2013 ACKMA
Conference at Waitomo**

The driving force behind why Capricorn Caves became such a successful operation under Ann's guidance was the culture of family that she built. The staff of the Capricorn Caves have been extremely privileged over the years to have travelled across Australia and internationally with Ann, as part of Savannah Guide Schools and ACKMA conferences.



Ann (third from right) and the Capricorn team at the 2018 ACKMA Conference at Margaret River

This was when Ann truly came to life. The morning of a trip away with staff her excitement could be likened to that of a giddy school girl. She would hug everyone, dance and have a smile from ear to ear. Often on these days she forgot to eat breakfast out of excitement. She took these times to get to know really know staff (and often find out more than they meant her too...) but she loved the stories.

Ann also loved a party. A glass (or bottle) of red, good company and a dance floor. She was always first on the dance floor and last to leave, happy dancing away by herself if no-one joined her. Her energy for life was contagious and it was impossible to spend time with her without catching her enthusiasm.

Ann attended her first ACKMA conference in 1993 and hosted her first in 1998. She was a major part of the organisation ever since. Ann volunteered her time to sit on the committee in various positions over the years (including unofficial conference photographer) and continued as a committee member until her passing. She has been recognised for her personal contribution to cave conservation and tourism as a **Fellow of ACKMA**.

If you asked Ann what legacy she would've like to leave

behind, there would be no mention of her ability to build a business from the ground up. No mention of a mother of 3 who worked 24/7 for decades in an industry of which she initially knew nothing. No mention of becoming one of the most respected women, not in the industry, but in the entire region. It wouldn't be money earned or awards or recognition. Ann's legacy is in the caves.

Under Ann's watch, the Capricorn Caves, which had 4 visitors on the day she took over, has become a location where people travel from around the world to appreciate.

Overseeing the scientific research, of what has become an internationally significant fossil site, will allow education to occur for so many future generations. Wheelchair access means no-one will ever need to miss the opportunity to take in the beauty of the Cathedral Cave again. Ann's legacy is not in what she has done for herself but what she has provided for future generations, long after we are all gone.