

Conclusions

Our brief visit to Laos focussed on known caves. Many changes have taken place, especially in remote country areas, in the 20 years since I last visited Laos. However, for those who are prepared to spend more time and to push into more remote areas, there are good prospects for making new discoveries, especially if they have local knowledge or assistance. Mains power was virtually everywhere, the mobile coverage was good and most houses, even in small villages, had satellite dishes.

For some of the sites we visited, it would have been relatively easy to make our own arrangements. However, we also benefitted greatly from Terry Bolger's local knowledge and assistance. In addition, engaging Green Discovery enabled our group to fully experience Xe Bang Fai Cave and to travel through Laos in an easy and efficient manner. The road network has expanded and the main highways are in good condition. However, many secondary roads are in poor condition, lack bridges and are likely to be impassable during the monsoon season. It is also likely that accommodation and transport facilities and services will not meet the expectations of many international visitors.

The caves we saw are in pretty good shape but careful management will be required to ensure that they do not suffer as Laos becomes a more popular tourist destination. Nevertheless, Laos is a wonderful destination for travellers interested in caves and karst. There is so much to see and do.

New Zealand Vice-President's report

Peter Chandler

First, I would like to congratulate Andy on his recent AM award. I recollect first meeting Andy at the 1987 travelling conference. Since then, we've come to appreciate him as a "living treasure" on all things caves and karst as well as a great friend and mentor.

It seemed somewhat extravagant to travel to South Australia for the AGM weekend, but it was required, really, when assuming my new role as New Zealand Vice-President.

It really was great to catch up with everyone (and meet some new members too), and introduce my son, Kieran, to the organisation he grew up with (and had last attended the AGM at Mulu).

At the AGM Committee meeting, I suggested that the 2022 conference be held in Takaka, the principal town of Golden Bay on the South Island. Pre-conference and possibly part of the conference would be on the Nelson (airport) side, at Motueka.

As well as Ngarua Cave, entire mountains of marble and hills of limestone, and - rare for NZ - dolomite, there are also the renowned Te Waikoropupu Springs. This is the largest freshwater spring in the southern hemisphere and the spring water is equal to the clearest. The Springs are part way through gaining some protection, as land use in the catchment threatens the purity of this natural treasure.

It would then be time for a Waitomo conference in 2028 (or thereabouts) as coming up on the calendar about then is the expected handing back of the Waitomo Glowworm Cave operation to the Ngati Ruapuha and Ngati Uekaha Hapu Trusts in June 2027.