

President's Report March 2020

What an amazing, and dreadful, summer! Fires across our precious karst areas – our busiest tourism season interrupted (= destroyed) at Jenolan, Wombeyan, Yarrangobilly, Buchan and Kelly Hill – but not to a great extent at Yanchep, I believe. Many of NSW's most significant karst areas were within fire perimeters. And then followed by extensive heavy rains causing more damage along the Eastern Seaboard karsts.

A group of ASF, ACKMA members and academics have prepared a survey proforma to help us assess what has happened to our karsts. If you are in a situation where you can assess fire impacts, I urge you to use the proforma and help us build on our knowledge of what has happened. More elsewhere in this Journal.

Jenolan was closed by fire on 18 December, reopened on 1 February and closed by landslide risk after extreme rainfalls on the access roads on 7 February. A reopening date of 24 February occurred. Similar situations were elsewhere such as at Wombeyan and Yarrangobilly.

Buchan reopened on 14 February – not the caves – just picnic and some camping areas. The caves, walking tracks etc. are still being assessed for damage and safety reasons. But the ADF and troops from Papua New Guinea and Fiji have at least made the site accessible by rebuilding two bridges. Federal and Royal Caves scheduled to re-open as of 7 March.

Then along came Covid-19!

The cancellation of the upcoming Jenolan Conference became necessary – all the great work by Jodie, Scott and others now being for naught.

The Committee is now discussing the future of the 23rd Conference. In the meantime, our thoughts and thanks must be with Jodie, Scott and their colleagues who worked so hard developing the Conference as well as coping with fire and flood and not pestilence! .

We now know that virtually all (if not all) cave sites in Australia and New Zealand are closed – it is going to be a hard year for us all.

For a few years I have been trying to track down the situation regarding one of our early Life Members - Alan Costigan who managed Buchan for some years – without success. Sadly, I found out a month or so ago that Alan has passed on to speleothem heaven. More elsewhere in this Journal.

As indicated, repeatedly, both Tim – our Editor – and I will not be standing again in our current positions. So put your hands up and help to help ACKMA develop (although Tim has agreed to stay on for a while given these dark Covid-19 times, he wishes—as he says in his editorial—to relinquish the role as soon as possible and, certainly, at no later than the 2021 AGM).

Andy Spate