

DISSOLUTE PRACTICES! ACKMA HEAVIES VISIT CAPE RANGE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- Andy Spate

The Western Australian Department of Environmental Protection recently retained the services of three ACKMA members to provide input into the development of a policy for the management of the Cape Range karst province halfway up the west coast. Elerly Hamilton-Smith, Kevin Kiernan and myself spent a very short week in the rain in the arid zone reviewing the resources, the issues and attempting to understand the local bureaucratic setting of this fascinating site. Many ACKMA members will have heard bits and pieces about management issues and the values of the area.

There are many exciting and wonderful karsty things at Cape Range - perhaps the most significant is the diverse terrestrial and aquatic invertebrate fauna and Australia's only troglobitic vertebrates. We actually saw a pool full of one of the latter - a blind gudgeon; the eel is more cryptic! Admittedly the fish were in daylight (late in the afternoon) but it was a karst pool - and tidal at that. Kevin and I were very excited about a series of a raised marine terraces, lovely limestone conglomerates and the potential for endless discussions about which red dunes were related to which white dunes - and whether there were four, five or more terraces and the significance of sharks teeth. No glaciers were encountered? We managed to corrupt the morals of a miner! Celery did heaps of reckoning, there

were some Andysezes and K² found caves where there were none. The latter was terribly oppressed by the density of the vegetation - actually the lack of it!

Following field inspections of the karst, quarries, garbage tips, sewage plants, defence facilities, urban areas, gravel pits, marinas and so on we retreated to Perth for a final presentation and debrief. Then back to the eastern states (sorry, Kiwis - middle states) for the much more tedious business of writing a report for the Department.

It was the first visit for all three of us to this area and we are very grateful for the opportunity. However, whilst we saw a great deal we would have liked to have seen more. From a karst perspective the area has been best studied for its cave biology thanks to the magnificent work of Bill Humphreys and his co-workers and in the bedrock geology and groundwater hydrologic contexts. There is heaps to be studied and evaluated and lots of caves to be found. There are many land use difficulties and potential conflicts, however. I am glad that the things that I wrote about a then-unvisited Cape Range for the paper that Lana and I gave at the last conference were not too far from the mark. I am given to understand that K² has some compromising photographs - but so have I.