

RECENT CONFERENCES

- Andy Spate

As noted in the last Journal, Jim Reside, Elery Hamilton-Smith, Brian Clarke, Lana Little and I attended the 7th Australasian Bat Society Conference at Naracoorte in April. In many ways the ABS is similar to ACKMA with its various interest groups and strands. For example there are university boffins, consultants, government agency representatives and wildlife carers. The Conference very much reflected this with most of the sessions and papers reflecting science on one hand and management on the other - both being leavened (fermented?) by the activities of hands-on people.

In many ways there was little of direct relevance to ACKMA's interests (but we will rectify that next time!). Elery gave an interesting paper on bat guano mining in Australian caves mainly concentrating on the South Australian experience. He also chaired a long workshop session on bat conservation generally which discussed the soon-to-be released Bat Action Plan which will set the directions (and hopefully supply funds) for various works to help Australia's bats. Lana presented the results of fieldwork with Les Hall, of the University of Queensland, at Cape Melville (north of Cooktown). Although they were not long in the area, and had other duties, a staggering amount of data was collected and some interesting inferences drawn.

The highlight of the conference was, of course, a visit to Brian's bat interpretation centre. At one stage there were so many people in the building that I was seriously wondering what the floor loading was in case there is cave directly beneath the building. This was followed by drinks and nibbles watching the evening bat flight - very civilised!

There was also an afternoon/evening session where a large range of trapping and acoustic survey gear was demonstrated. The big mist-net and Teary Reardon's 'spud gun' were major attractions here.

During an appalling business session Elery and I gave the meeting the benefit of our many years of constitution-mongering - both the latter and influencing the meeting were not easy tasks!. Whether we gained any members or not from our exposure of ACKMA Inc at the conference I do not know; however, we will lift our exposure in years to come.

More recently I attended the 7th meeting of the Australia New Zealand Geomorphology Group in Cairns. There were quite a large number of ACKMA Inc members and other karst workers there including Nick and Sue White, Kevin

Kiernan, Paul Williams, John Webb, Robert Wray and Derek Fabel. Apologies to any I have left off the list. The most enduring memory of this conference was the high-tech lecture theatre which left speaker after speaker stranded with no lights, too many lights, no slides, all the slides again and again and some times just one slide on many occasions. I will gloss over the even higher-tech aspects which proved even more awful! However, one feature of interest was the foundation stone for the new Cairns' campus of James Cook University. A lump of Chillagoe marble, appropriately weathered into "Henry Moore-type" forms beneath the soil surface had been "improved" here and there with an angle grinder. The natural sub-soil etching of the various crystal planes was excellent and I took far more photos than it was worth.

There were only two karst papers. Frank Ahnert and Paul Williams (Germany and New Zealand respectively) gave an interesting dissertation on computer modelling of the development of karst landscapes towards dolines, 'cockpit' country and tower karst. Sue (with Nick on their way back from China!) gave a synopsis of the Cainozoic karsts of the Otway Basin. There were very many interesting and well presented talks (in spite of the hi-tech) non-karst papers including Robert Wray's talk on minor karst forms in sandstones. Perhaps I should have said three karst papers - the preoccupation with limestone again!

The conference was followed by a two-day field trip. The first day was taken with travelling to Chillagoe with subsequent inspections of many features of the area. This was lead by John Webb - there was lots of discussion about the age of the bluffs (= towers) and the karst generally - it does seem to be very old - but? There was an after-dinner visit to Carpentaria Cave - very impressive (and very differently impressive by daylight!). The following day we moved west from Chillagoe into country of fairly limited relevance to most ACKMA members. I stayed a few days longer to investigate the potential for dating the rates of development of solution pans, rillenkarren and so on. We shall see...

The ANZGG has always made a great thing about being very informal and has argued strongly in the past against having constitutions and the like. It is interesting to see the conniptions they are going through to keep an organisation going with no formal pattern. Sue and I were well to the fore in these discussions which were very similarly unordered to the bat people. Sue had earlier provided a pre-incorporation ACKMA constitution as a model. Perhaps ACKMA Inc could become a consultant to all sorts of trans-Tasman groups?