

"CAVEWORKS" OPENS!!!!

- Kent Henderson

Travelling back to Margaret River for the *Caveworks* opening was a warmly anticipated thrill. ACKMA President, Mick Chalker, Jenolan Caves Manager, Andrew Fletcher, and I, arrived in Perth mid afternoon on Friday 21 February. Mick and Andrew, who arrived 1/2 a hour earlier from Sydney, met my Melbourne flight, and we then happily drove to Margaret River, catching up on considerable cave gossip on the way.

Upon arrival at Lake Cave, the usual hugs & kisses were exchanged with Margaret River Caves Manager, Robyn McBeath, whereupon she led us to a rather palatial house in Margaret River that the Tourist Association had arranged for our weekend domicile. After a pleasant dinner in a local hotel, we retired to a late night of verbal banter and further imbibing.

It was fascinating for me, in particular, to have long chats with Andrew Fletcher. Despite having met him several times before (he has been Jenolan Caves Manager for 2 1/2 years now), this was my first real opportunity of having an extended session with him. In truth, he does have a visionary outlook as to the future of Jenolan Caves, which I found impressive.

The following morning saw us join other "dignitaries" for the Official Opening of *Caveworks*, at Lake Cave. Not use to the status (at least, not I), we were certainly showered with kindness. Mick had spent half the night (?) working on his 30 minute speech, but was nonetheless delighted when the politicians got to gasbag instead.

A large number of ACKMA members were present. Elery Hamilton-Smith had flown over from Melbourne and was staying with Rauliegh Webb and Dr. John Watson had come up from Albany. Aside from Robyn and Margaret River Karst Resources Officer Peter Bell, CALM's District Manager Neil Taylor, as was Liam Kinsella of Ngilgi Cave.

After my words concerning Liam's efforts in the last ACKMA Journal, I was unsure of our meeting. Happily, he had taken my constructive criticisms gratefully. After several hours in traction and having had my broken jaw wired-up, it was time for the 11am Official Opening. The band had been playing constantly for over a hour prior to the speeches and mercifully stopped for the speeches, albeit only briefly. The officiating pollicie, Hon. Geoff Prosser, Federal Minister for Small Business (and local MP), gave a scintillating party political broadcast, but he did manage to mention *Caveworks* during his virtual reality address, and many of those who contributed to it. Mick and Elery got specific mentions of their presence - the lot of dignitaries, I'm told. Very appropriately, suitable mention was made of the contributions of the late Keith Tritton. It was indeed sad that Keith did not

live to see *Caveworks* completed. His widow, Kathy, was present, and this gave us the opportunity to personally convey our sympathy on Keith's passing.

So, the speeches were over, the copious food and wine was due to flow, but first - what we had really come for - *Caveworks*!! The Official Party was first in, naturally! And as expected, of course, it was wonderful!! A cave environment has been created and set up complete with decoration, stream and boardwalks. The interactive displays were excellent, as were the historical, geological and interpretive displays. Robyn, Peter and the many involved has put a huge amount of thought into what is an absorbing sensory experience. I was highly impressed, as were we all, and finally the Waitomo Museum of Caves has a worthy Australian rival - albeit still in its infancy. Elery, in his typical understanding style, suggested it was "a good beginning". Certainly, the displays will evolve further in time, but the first up effort is extraordinarily good, let me tell you!!

After considerable ingesting and imbibing, the dignitaries embarked on a tour of Lake Cave, and again, were impressed with Peter Bell's re-lighting efforts, although Elery and I (amongst others) would have been more impressed if the coloured lighting had "gone to God" in the process. Still, Lake is now impressively lit. I happened to capture a rather interesting photo of Rauliegh Webb being "naughty" in Lake Cave, but after his substantial grovelling and pleading, I promised not to publish the incriminating evidence (the photo came out fine, Rauliegh ...), provided he remained "good" in the future. Naturally, I will not hesitate in placing it is a future edition should such not prove to be case...!!!

After the Official Party arose from the Lake Cave doline for more Epicurean delights, Mick, Andrew and I were whisked off by Neil Taylor to look at CALM's local offerings. We had a brief look down Bride's Cave doline, and discussed the permit-permitted abseiling there, and the same later at Giant's Cave. Neil had written me a rebuttal letter after I questioned the possible litigation ramifications of purpose-built CALM abseiling constructions in the last ACKMA Journal (his "letter to the editor" is adjacent), but despite his rebuttals I remain unconvinced. Only a test case will tell, I suppose, which we all hope will never the necessary.

Then to Caldarp Cave. This ex-tourist cave (early this century) has been used by CALM in recent times for adventure tourism. However, Neil has the funding to light it as a full show cave, which he hopes will be up and running by mid-year. It will be self-guided, and Neil took the opportunity of gaining the expert advice of Mick Chalker, particularly in lighting. Caldarp will come up very well. Its boardwalks are already in place. Aside from areas of excellent decoration, its main feature is two large

shallow lake chambers, which should offer excellent reflections and other interpretative opportunities. Perhaps we'll all fly back for its Official Opening! Any excuse to play "dignitaries" again!! Incidentally, tour tariffs will be \$7 per adult, \$4 per child.

About two hours later we arrived back at Caveworks, to discover that all the Pollies and most other "opening invitees" had departed. Robyn and Peter were in a near state of exhaustion, but piteously we dragged them off to Moondyne & Jewel Caves. I hadn't time during my brief visit last October to do Moondyne, and it was inspiring to view Peter Bell's efforts in sensitively turning it into a superb adventure cave experience. Moondyne is toured daily at 10am, with a maximum party size of seven (plus guide), @ \$25 per head tariff.

And so to Jewel Cave! - which we all agreed needs major future work. Andrew Fletcher was particularly impressed with the quality of the cave, which he magnanimously compared most favourably with Jenolan's Orient Cave. No argument from me. Then it was onto Augusta for dinner, where we were joined by Elery and Rauliegh (they'd been looking at cave entrances somewhere or other..), prior to us all returning to our weekend palace for further refreshments.

Sunday morning saw us trundle off early to Mammoth Cave for a Robyn-led guided tour, minus Peter Bell who was suffering (justifiably) from "caveworks exhaustion". Like many cave managers, she didn't know how to operate the lights! Sigh... - but we made do! Great things have happened in Mammoth (as I expounded in the last ACKMA Journal), with more to come as the cave is re-lit and the boardwalks expanded.

Back at Caveworks, we again wandered around the displays, prior to goodbyes. Rauliegh and Elery were driving back to Perth via God knows where, while Mick and Andrew were heading to Ngilgi Cave at Yallingup prior to doing likewise. As for me, my "wired jaw" was telling me that another visit to Liam's cave on this trip was probably not a good idea!! Aide from the fact I had to fly out for Melbourne later that afternoon. The Tourist Association most kindly arranged for a light plane to ferry me back to Perth. It was my first trip in a single prop cessna - an exhilarating, if initially scary, experience!! Ah, the delights of being a dignitary!!

So, what a weekend!!! A massive thankyou to *Augusta-Margaret River Tourist Association* Manager, Pauline McLeod, Robyn McBeath and Peter Bell for looking after us so well. My final word on *Caveworks*? - get to see it ASAP!!!!