

MANAGING RAWHITI CAVE, Golden Bay, New Zealand

- Jane Baird

After the death of Darcy Manson, the original owner and tour guide, trespassers went up to the cave and vandalized it. They broke speleothems by throwing rocks at them, and wrote their names on some. As the entrance to the cave is so big it is not possible to gate it. So one of my biggest nightmares is a vandal. Sometimes after a tour I have had to turn around and go back up the mountain as I have seen trespassers trying to hide from me, when all you really want to do is go home and have a beer. However, as I run cave tours on demand people are never sure when I am there, so that is a thing in my favour.

I have taken it upon myself to be responsible for the cleaning of the cave, as no one else has the same interest in the cave as I. It all started about 7½ years ago when I went into the Inner Cavern and saw all the mess from former tours. There were rotten totara posts, used for holding up the netting to stop people walking on the formations, and old rusting netting and wire lying around half buried and trampled. There were also a few broken bottles, what these were used for I do not know, although I had heard some of the old tours used to take hip flasks with whisky into the cave.

You name it, and I seem to have found it. Old boots and soles, flash bulbs, old candles, ropes, billies, and tins - one with cement in it. So gradually I have been carrying it all out. As I pick it up I put it into buckets or sacks so as not to drop it all through the cave. Occasionally some tourist will help. Due to the location of the cave entrance, which is 380 metres above sea level, I do some of this work while I am waiting to guide a tour. At times I have taken tourists free of charge if they help me clean up in the cave for a hour.

I have worked on the track to the cave, and in and around the entrance at times by myself, but never in the inner cavern. My family does not like me being up there on my own, but of course my husband and son do the major work.

Darcy Manson must have used flares to light up the cave as some of the formations have rust marks on them. I have not tried to clean these, as some are very delicate. I have done some cleaning with a nail brush and cave water. However, this was very time consuming and the water ran down my arm, so I

bought a hand-held plastic garden sprayer that works quite well - if what you are cleaning hasn't been on too long. I am sure tourists think I am mad trying to clean the cave with a nail brush, but when I demonstrate they seem quite interested and try even harder not to touch the formations. That alone is worth some of the effort.

One afternoon I went through all of Darcy Manson's glass plate negatives at the Nelson Provincial Museum and on one, at the entrance to the cave, was a sign: "visitor's to the cave please do not throw stones". Let's hope the cave always stays privately owned, that way it will have more protection.

As the cave entrance is so big, birds fly in and out at their leisure. A fantail landed on a straw and broke it, I heard the tinkle as it hit the ground. Just as well the moa are extinct, although they must have had a few parties there as they left their bones lying around. Outside the cave we have a problem with wild goats and possums which we shoot and poison at different times. First I feed the possums with flour and curry powder, then we get a better kill. The wild goats use the same track as we do. I can sometimes call a young one close enough so the tourists can see it, but as soon as it smells us it's off.

The walk to Rawhiti meanders through magnificent Podocarp bush with one totara tree having a 27 foot girth. If you refer back to ACKMA Journal No 15 (June, 1994), you can read my previous article on the cave, and on the front cover of Journal No 14 (March 1994) is a photo of visitors at the entrance taken by Darcy Manson on 18 April 1912. I have the original visitors book now so I have all the names of the people in that photo, but I can only put a face to four.

To quote from a local newspaper: "The Rawhiti Cave at Motupipi has fascinated visitors to the area for almost ninety years. The long established popularity of the cave is such that Rawhiti Cave tour guide Jane Baird has recently taken visitors to the cave who are literally following in their grandparents and parents footsteps. An elderly man in his seventies returned to the cave with Jane last year after first visiting this natural tourist attraction as a seven year old".