

THE POST CONFERENCE STUDY TOUR

- Kent Henderson

Twenty souls from the Waitomo ACKMA Conference, not satisfied with just one week of karst ecstasy, determined to undertake the *Post Conference Study Tour* to the Nelson Region. Two replete mini buses left the Waitomo Hotel on Sunday 4 May, heading for Wellington. A most pleasant stop was made en route to the active volcano Mt. Ruapehu, including a look in its excellent DOC Interpretative Centre. After an agreeable overnight at a Backpackers Hotel and dinner at a Turkish restaurant, the group was well refreshed by Monday morning for a special visit to the massive new *Museum of New Zealand* on the Wellington water front, which our guides advised us had sex (sic) levels!! And who should suddenly appear to join this little tour, but Captain Speedo! No, he wasn't on the mini buses down from Waitomo. The caped wonder had just flown in, I suppose. However, he mysteriously vanished again before the tour was over. The last we'd see of him, so we thought...

The museum will not be opened to the public until next February, and most of the displays are no yet *in situ*, but our extensive tour was nonetheless fascinating. What we had mainly come to see was the "cave" constructed in the museum gardens. Well done it was too, although not yet completed. It even had a few cave spiders already in residence! Someone thought its cave gating policy needed work (!), and our general feeling was that its concrete inner walls (though clearly of a limestone base!) could have been a bit truer to cave colours. Minor criticisms, however.

By mid afternoon we were on the ferry to Picton on the South Island, a most pleasant trip (during which Diane Vavryn slept through the movie *"Dangerous Creatures"* and Neil Taylor laughed himself hoarse), thence by bus to Nelson for our overnight stop in another pleasant backpacker hotel. We were meet in Nelson by Ian Millar, the Study Tour organizer who, not surprisingly, did a fantastic job! Our restaurant in Nelson that evening was most obliging, although one nameless delegate managed to clear out all other patrons by banging the table rather loudly! Shocking, really! Back at our accommodation, Neil Taylor caused an early morning stir amongst some young female backpackers who, arriving back in the early hours, found him asleep (?) on the corridor floor. A drunken stupor, perhaps? Undoubtedly, although he pleaded some lame yarn about the two delegates in his room snoring. A fairy story, of course!

Day one of the Study Tour proper had us scheduled to travel over Takaka Hill to Golden Bay. Just as we were leaving Nelson, who should suddenly step out of an adjacent phone booth but, yes, Captain Speedo!! He kissed hands and bade us well - the last we'd see of him this time surely, hopefully....!!

First up we visited the Riwaka resurgence, and then drove up Takaka Hill to Hawkes lookout. A wonderful view, and many karst issues raised. A trip up Cannan Road to Harwood's Hole was next. After a 40 minute walk we stood before the massive 175m tomo, which gets 10,000 visitors per annum. The big issue here was abseiling safety, and quite divergent opinions were offered on what infrastructure, if any, DOC should put in place. After Harwoods, it was onto Mike & Lorraine Endres' *Ngarua Cave*. This fully lit tourist cave is a through tour, and is very well decorated. Mike's colourful narrative was enjoyed by all, although some couldn't quite work out how the moa bones had fallen so conveniently next to the pathway!!

For the next two nights we stayed in rather sumptuous "backpaper" accommodation at Golden Bay, replete with all creature comforts and composting toilets!! The next day, Wednesday, saw another full day of karst rhapsody. We zoomed between many karst features first up, including a look at a disused limestone quarry, before heading for Jan Baird's *Rawhiti Cave*. It was several hundred metres up the side of a mountain, folks. We knew it when we got the top, I can tell you. But wow, what a cave entrance! Its massive collapsed cave entrance was close to the most impressive I've seen. Down inside the gaping entrance were some the best displays of flowstone imaginable, not to mention oolites! The late morning light through the wide entrance lit the whole vista up like a show cave. But there was more! We finally descended into the narrow bottom passages on the cave, which is incredibly decorated with mostly pure white secondary deposition, quite reminiscent of the best in the August/Margaret River area of Western Australia. Jane guides "adventure-type" trips to the cave regularly, and we all greatly appreciated her tour on this occasion. What impressed us all was Jane's fervent love for, and dedication to, Rawhiti Cave, and her excellent management despite very limited resources. An anecdotal article by Jane on her cave appears elsewhere in this Journal edition.

Moving on, we visited the Grove Scenic Reserve with its spectacular grikes, and the Waikoropupu Springs, the resurgence of the marble aquifer, providing the largest freshwater springs in New Zealand. Great stuff! And then, to top off a wonderful day, we made a twilight visit to Crawford McLennan's *Te Anoroa Cave*, at Rockville, near Collingwood, at the western end of Golden Bay. Here was step back in time! Crawford has been running tours to this upper level cave in the Aorere Valley since Moses was a boy. He issued us with kerosene *pressure lamps* - unique stuff! The cave is very much the old stream passage type, with a goodly smattering of speleothems towards the rear of the tour. Subfossils are a feature of the cave, with one roof section containing what are probably dolphin bones. Some 350 metres of dryish cave is toured, which is pretty much level. It has been

ungated for most of its show cave history (and before, clearly!). During a visit a year or two ago, Peter Dimond suggested to Crawford that a gate about halfway through the cave would be a good idea, given the technical difficulties of gating the entrance. Crawford subsequently took that advice, too! (see adjacent photo)

So back for dinner....and who should turn up, yet again? Sigh... yes, our guardian angel, Captain Speedo!! He condescended to stay overnight this time. Very magnanimous, we thought. So, almost as quickly as it began, the Study Tour was over. The

next day saw some delegates depart, some go wild caving. Captain Speedo very kindly drove Robyn McBeth, Neil Taylor and I to Nelson to pick up a hire car, whence we headed South down the West Coast to Te Anau Caves. But that is yet another story.....!! To be continued...

What a marvellous few short days!!! Many, many thanks go to Ian Millar, and the local DOC staff who acted as bus drivers, karst interpreters, and general dogs' bodies, and to Mike & Lorraine Endres, Jane Baird, and Crawford McLennan, for so kindly guiding us through their respective caves.

For the record, those attending the Post Conference Study Tour were:

Ian Millar
Greg Martin
Jane Baird
Peter Brogains
Peter Dimond
Jo Goralie
Kent Henderson

Sarah McRae
Mick MacRobb
Lyn MacRobb
Nigel Montfort
Miles Pierce
Rhonwon Pierce
Ray Scrimgeor

Dave Smith
Robert Tahiri
Neil Taylor
Dianne Vavryn
Rauleigh Webb
Nick White
Captain Speedo (?)