

NORTH QUEENSLAND NEWS

- Lana Little

Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS) members have been up at the Mitchell-Palmer karst again this year, to complete a north-to-south search of the towers for ghost bat sites, as part of their National Estate Grant Program. This year they found few sites, but have still marked off several more towers as now "searched". They have a very big job, but they have reached recognition for their efforts by making the short-list for The Readers Digest 1997 Environmental Awards. The winners have not yet been announced, and we wish CQSS every success.

Graeme Russell, from The Chillagoe National Parks Centre, has transferred to Rockhampton, where we hope he will continue to be active in the cave and karst management scene. This means there is a new ranger at Chillagoe, and we welcome Tony Cockburn, a very savvy bloke who has just started with us. He has heaps to offer and is settling in very well.

There is a "new" tour being offered at Chillagoe. It is actually an enormously

foreshortened Royal Arch Cave tour, using just the chambers near the entrance. It was devised to meet the needs of less vigorous clientele, and is consequently confined to relatively flat areas, while still making use of both dark and day-lit chambers, and incorporates many of the grand features of the cave system. There is opportunity for a sit-down in a couple of places. The tour has been particularly well received, and looks set to be offered on an on-going basis. It required very little infrastructure alteration (an extra handrail here, a paved area there), and similarly minor alterations to guide rosters to achieve a most satisfactory result.

It is, of course, very hot at Chillagoe at the present time, and visitation is low now that the September-October flurry of visiting school groups has died to a trickle. In my next installment, maybe I will be able to pass on the heights of rising waters in the caves? Here's to a good wet season, and wishing all ACKMA members a very happy and safe Christmas and New Year. See you at the Gabfest at in Western Australia early next year!