

4th KARST STUDIES SEMINAR – MOLE CREEK 1998

- Kent Henderson

Karst Studies Seminars are somewhat laid back events, the 4th such in the series, held at Moles Creek Caves in Tasmania (10-13 February) was no exception. Added to the general air of mystery that often surrounds the published (and usually) unpublished pre-information on these events, the latest Karst Studies Seminar had the added aura of being hosted by the somewhat erratic countenance of Henry Shannon. But a more delightful eccentric you couldn't meet!

I arrived late on the Monday night from Melbourne, after a pleasant flight into Launceston in the company of Sue White and Ken Grimes, and a leisurely hire-car trip to Mole Creek. Sue and Ken were residing at the Seminar venue, the Mole Creek Guest House, while I was staying 2 km up the road at the home of Mole Creek Caves Manager Chester Shaw and his lovely partner, Kay, after their very generous invitation to put me up (and put up with me!)

The three days of the Seminar were structured with caving and surface karst field trips during the day (mostly), and papers at night. Day One, the Tuesday, saw a trip to the Circular Ponds area for a look at its polygonal karst. It is an area of tightly packed doline development, many caves, and a rather spectacular area of grikes. Late morning saw the first two papers (the only ones to be delivered in daylight hours). The first was an excellent paper from Jill Rowling on *Ribbon Helictites*, thus far only described at Jenolan and Waitomo anywhere in the world. How they form is even more problematical that "normal" helictites! The second was a particularly interesting offering from Ken Grimes on *Sand Speleothems at Loch Ard Gorge in Victoria*, which in due course will appear in *Helictite*. As some may know, Sue White and Ken Grimes are imminently to take over the editing of Australia's premier karst science journal. After lunch, many attendees paid a visit to the wonderful Croesus Cave.

After dinner, three papers were offered. The first was from Dave Gillieson on the *International Geographic Union Karst Committee* (a version of which is published elsewhere in this Journal). The next offering was, for me, the paper of the week. This was Allison Downing's (et al) *Changes in Bryophyte Communities on Limestones in South-Eastern Australia – Implications for Management on Karst Systems*. The paper is extremely relevant indeed to cave and karst management, and Alison has kindly permitted its reproduction in this Journal. The final paper for the evening was John Dunkley's *Bullita Cave System in the Gregory Karst, NT*. The Canberra Speleological Society has been conducting annual expeditions to this remote location for several years, and has mapped many kilometres of this massive cave system.

The Wednesday proved an interesting day. First up we headed off to Marakoopa Tourist Cave, not for the "usual reason", but to undertake, as Henry Shannon called it: "A Grand Tour of Marakoopa, Marakoopa 2 Cave, and the entrances to Devils Earhole and Devils Pot". Back at the 1995 ACKMA Conference in Tasmania Andy Spate led an similar expedition up the Marakoopa streamway and out its top entrance, to visit Marakoopa 2 Cave, whose entrance was, he advised, a few metres away from the Marakoopa 1 exit. He knew exactly where it was. About an hour of bush bashing and leeches later, and we never did find the entrance.... Sigh. Happily, on this occasion, Henry did know where the entrance was, a mere few metres away! Again, Marakoopa 2 was a relatively narrow stream passage cave, with an active watercourse through it. In our party was Allison Downing who has been an ACKMA member for a couple of years, but had never been in a wild cave before!! She enjoyed the experience, I can tell you, even if it was *baptism by fire*!

After alighting from Marakoopa 2 at its top entrance/exit, Henry's next leadership role was to find the track to civilization. Initially, he was navigationally challenged, and very soon thereafter, geographically embarrassed. One wit asked him if he knew what State he was in, and he replied "The State of Confusion". That's our, Henry! After much tooting and froing, the track was eventually located, as were the entrances to Devil's Earhole and Devil's Pot – both massive, deep dolines – prior to tracking back to the Tourist Cave car park.

The evening session saw five papers. First up was Stefan Eberhard's *Cave Fauna Management at Ida Bay*, accompanied by numerous slides (as were most papers). I'd heard Stefan deliver a similar paper before, and the quality of this one was as high as ever. Ken Grimes followed with an interesting offering on *Scott Creek Karst at Byaduk, Victoria*, in which he discussed its drainage system diverted underground by a lava flow. Quite fascinating stuff. Arthur Clarke (recently not knighted in Sri Lanka, is that him?) was next, with a paper on *Carbonate Rock Karsts of Tasmania*, giving a good overview of the State. Fourth up was Sue White with her *Lithological Aspects of Syngenetic Karst in Pleistocene Dunes in South-Western Victoria*. Last up was Henry Shannon's *Effect of the 1997 Earthquake on Mole Creek Caves*, during which he presented strong photographic evidence of significant damage in Lynd's Cave.

Thursday, the final day, saw a morning excursion to Baldock's Cave, at Sassafras Creek, south of Mole Creek. This was briefly a tourist cave last century. Perhaps surprisingly, its profuse secondary deposition is still in quite good shape, and could hold its own if it was a tourist cave today. One

interesting aspect of the cave is its archeological significance. It is strewn with artifacts, mostly *in situ*, from its brief tourist use over a century ago. After morning tea, the group headed to view Gilliam Creek sink, and associated cave entrances, many of which were quite large.

In the afternoon, it was a change-over of groups to visit Croesus and Lynd's Cave. I went to Croesus, one of Tasmania's "best" caves. I first saw it with Andy Spate some year's ago now, and yes, it hasn't changed – magnificent! It was interesting to do the raft trip (past the Golden Staircase section) which wasn't there during my first visit. We had Allison Downing with us on this trip too, and by now she was (almost) a seasoned caver. She tackled the "Master Lock" with ease!

The final night of papers was great. Albert Goede started an hour long dissertation on *Paleoenvironmental Information from Speleothems* (not quite the sex life of stalactites, but close...!). He was followed by Greg Horne, a Ranger from Jasper National Park, in Alberta, Canada (out here on holiday), who delivered a magic slide show on his Park and its karst. Wonderful stuff. Finally, John Wools-Cobb of Northern Caverneers Caving Club presented a very recently made 35 minute video on Kubla Khan Cave. Very well done indeed!

After a late start on the Friday morning and farewells to all, Ken, Sue and I drove into Launceston to spend the afternoon at the home of Henry and Rosie Shannon. I hadn't had the pleasure of meeting the affable Rosie before. She is a delight, and a touch less eccentric than Henry, too! Their large, rambling home was something to behold. It is not often that the motor mower is taken out from under the dining room table before you sit down for lunch! Ken Grimes tells the story of a past visit to the Shannon "mansion", and of the thown (not throne) room, which is quite self-descriptive. A would-be house guest for the night was clearing a corner of the room to sleep in, and after wading through many layers of debris came across a flashing computer with the words on the screen – "Insert Disk B"!!

Finally, that evening, we wound our way to airport for our flight back to Melbourne. Thank you Henry and Rosie for your wonderful organization of a most memorable event, and your great personal hospitality. A big thank you, too, to the management of the Mole Creek Guest House, whose food and graciousness was second to none! Wellington Caves has a hard act to follow in two years time!