

EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

As all are aware, the next (13th) Conference will be held in Mount Gambier next April. Wombeyan, NSW, will host the 2001 (14th) Conference. Lana Little, QNPWS District Ranger, has expressed interest in hosting the 2003 (15th) Conference at Chillagoe & Undara. She is in discussions with "higher authorities" on the matter, and should these ultimately prove fruitful (as expected), a "bid" will be made at the AGM at Naracoorte next year. I understand New Zealand is looking at the 2005 (16th) Conference, possibly for Takaka/Punakaiki, so assuming all the above eventuates, we appear to be "set" for a few years to come!

I have just made mention of the Wombeyan Conference in 2001. Accommodation for this Conference will be at Goulburn, and field trips will undoubtedly go, at least, to Bungonia and Abercombie, as well as Wombeyan. As I understand it, the possibility has been floated of it being a "joint" ACKMA/ASF Conference with ASF holding their conference in the week immediately after, or before, ours. This scenario has been muted in the past, to date without success. The main reason is that ASF is want to hold its biennial Conferences straight after Christmas, or at least in school holidays, which obviously presents problems for cave managers. However, latest intelligence suggests that the problem of timing may be able to be accommodated. Watch this space...

The next meeting of the ACKMA Naracoorte Conference Organizing Committee will be held at Mount Gambier over the weekend of Saturday 31st October & Sunday 1st November. Aside from various organizational discussions, the Committee will be looking at the Conference venues. A new **CONFERENCE BOOKING FORM** is inserted in this Journal. Unfortunately, following finalization of transport costs, it has been necessary to slightly increase the Conference Fees. PLEASE use this new form when booking, and discard the original.

I was speaking to Dale Calnin, Senior Ranger at Buchan Caves, recently. He tells me that "new" Caves Manager, Mark Krause, has settled in well, and that things are really moving ahead at Buchan. Dale promises he will be a definite starter at the Naracoorte Conference next year, and is confident Mark will be present as well. Much has been happening. The recent Gippsland floods closed both the Royal Cave (for five days only) and the Fairy Cave. There was minimal damage underground, but the road up to Fairy Cave was partly washed away, so that cave remains closed until the necessary repairs are funded – evidentially soon. Underground, quite a bit has been transpiring

- more path regenerating and improved lighting has occurred in Fairy Cave, and recently a geotechnician was called in to (re)inspect Federal Cave. His report was positive, so is likely Federal will join Lilly Pilly Cave as an *Adventure Tour Cave* in the near future. Federal, an old tourist cave, was canned some years back by the Mines Department ("noted" karst experts...) as *unsafe*. Also at Buchan, a number of risk management projects have been undertaken, particularly in tracking and fencing in the Reserve. The business planning exercise at Buchan continues, with a final result due early next year. It is not unlikely, as recently occurred at Princess Margaret Rose Cave in Western Victoria, that the guiding operation, camping, and kiosk will be leased out a concessionaire(s), while the Reserve and karst will remain under *Parks Victoria* management. Maybe the guides at Buchan will emulate those at PMR?

The recent flooding in NSW also caused problems at cave locations. Grove Creek at Abercrombie Caves flooded over all causeways, and for a time the self-guided tour was closed, although guided tours continued. The Wombeyan Caves the creeks also flooded, causing temporary cave closures, and some subsequent electrical problems. However, damage at both cave locations was slight, and full services have been resumed.

An article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* recently, stating that gondolas were to be installed at Jenolan Caves as part of its re-development of access. I am advised the article was something of a media beat-up. A study conducted several years ago short-listed six possible options for access to Jenolan, including the status-quo and aerial access. No decisions have been announced regarding the project, although it is known that discussions are being held by the Trust with the Minister. Other news from the Trust is the recent release of the draft **Wombeyan Caves Plan of Management**. A "poster" concerning this is adjacent, with comments closing on 30 November. Any ACKMA member can readily obtain a copy of the draft plan, on request.

Other major news concerns a recent landslide at Jenolan Caves from above the "Two Mile" down to the front of Caves House. This is the fourth landslide in the last thirty years, and without doubt not the last. Clearly, the drainage infrastructure at Jenolan needs careful, if not urgent, attention and highlights what are clearly many engineering problems. Given this recent occurrence, "Shades of the Thredbo Disaster" will, hopefully, focus political minds on what is a very real threat at Jenolan.

Elery Hamilton-Smith, our *occasionally-resident* cave management guru, is off overseas yet again. In late August he is scheduled to spend two weeks in Slovenia advising on cave management, while it is likely he will be in Vietnam in December for a cave & karst conference. Naturally, a full reporting and photos will appear in future Journal editions!

Ernie Holland has been in the Bathurst Hospital recently, having a knee reconstruction operation. He is now home and doing well, although keeping him quiet for the necessary six weeks recuperation is reportedly axiomatic! I understand that his stature will be taller and straighter, particularly after he has the other knee done next year – he will be *Flipper* no longer!! Warmest regards, Ernie, for a full recovery!

Looking in early back editions of the “ACMA Newsletter” for a reference recently, I came across a quote from Dr. John Watson which, giving that Telstra is hot news these days, is worth repeating nearly 10 years on. John noted: “An *anonymous national telecommunications organization recently approached me to provide advice on how to cut a trench across the Nullarbor for a below ground cable by a route which would avoid any areas with karst features. We have along way to go nationally it would seem in appreciation of karst.*” I wonder how much has

changed in this area in the last decade? We live in hope!!

And finally, an anonymous report in a recent edition *Speleo Spiel* (Newsletter of the Southern Tasmanian Caverneers Inc.) is of *comic* interest:

THE KARST X-FILES

Police reports indicate that on a balmy day in May this year drivers on the Midlands Highway reported seeing several strange objects littering the roadside. On closer examination the said objects appeared to be cave formations. One motorist reported that a large unidentified flying object, with the “look of a small black hole” was seen blowing through a paddock. We believe the local Karst Officer was called in to investigate this strange phenomenon. Apparently Mr. Household declined as the sighting was just too nebulous for him to bother wasting time on.

Secret sources have revealed that this phenomenon does indeed have an earthly explanation. From the State Government Department of Red Faces it has been revealed that a well-known person, (you could say a household name) happened to misplace a portable cave exhibit whilst en-route home from *Agfest*. Rumour has it that the failure of some low technology equipment, namely a length of electric fencing wire, was the cause of the release of this high technology exhibit.