

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

-Greg Martin

We are now well and truly into 1999 and I understand registrations have flowed heavily for 13th ACKMA Conference, now just weeks rather than months way. The Conference has attracted greater international interest than we have experienced in the past, an indicator of the increased standing that ACKMA has now established in many parts.

On the New Zealand scene, around New Years day, Kieran McKay of Waitomo, a well known cave explorer, suffered leg, arm and facial injuries following an accidental fall deep in the Bulmer Cave near Murchison, Mt Owen. More than 50 cavers answered the call to retrieve him from 5.5km inside the mostly dry cave in what is considered the biggest caving rescue operation ever undertaken in New Zealand. The rescue, estimated by the police to have costs tens of thousands of dollars, brought cave exploration into the public arena with wide media coverage and much debate about the expenditure of public money on such rescues and likened the situation to the rescue of solo yachtsmen. Kieran his recovering from the accident and says that it has not dampened his enthusiasm to continue with cave exploration. I understand an article on the rescue is elsewhere in this Journal.

The land survey work for demarcation of the boundaries for the wahi tapu (burial site) at the traditional tourist entrance to Ruakuri Cave has

been completed and was recently checked on the ground by Department of Conservation staff and a representative of the local Maori, Rua Anderson. The gate at the cave entrance has been found to be some metres beneath the Tumutumu Road and this has added to the complications of technically achieving legal protection for this traditional heritage site. The Waitomo District Council will now be consulted to assist in finding a solution. Meantime, work continues on the proposal for reopening of the Ruakuri Cave for tourism. The Resource Consent issues are being worked through and some cleaning and preparation work has commenced.

The Glowworm Cave has experienced a recovery in visitor numbers and planning has advanced for a new jetty at the cave exit. The new design will involve excavation to achieve a gradient on the ramp /pathway from the jetty suitable for wheelchair access. It is planned to commence the work over the quieter winter months.

Black Water Rafting are presently negotiating with Derek and Jill Mason, over some involvement in Mason's Cave. Watch this space! I am looking forward to catching up with a great many members at the Naracoorte Conference. The program looks superb and I am sure that it will be another memorable event for all delegates. See you there!!