

CAMMOO CAVES CHANGE HANDS THE RECONCILIATION STORY CONTINUES

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INTRODUCTION

The dispute to save caves in the Mount Etna region from limestone mining by Central Queensland Cement (CQC) was fought by many individuals from many organisations, including the University of Queensland Speleological Society, Capricorn Conservation Council (CCC), Queensland Conservation Council (QCC), Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS), Wildlife Preservation Society (WPS) and the Australian Speleological Federation (ASF). The conservation efforts to save caves began in 1962 and continued until 1990 and were by then the longest running conservation issue in Australia. The *Mount Etna Committee* was made up of representatives from the above organisations but many others were also involved in the issue, such as well known Australian bat researchers, supportive politicians, Bat Conservation International, International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources - Species Survival Commission - *Chiroptera* Specialist Group, Field Naturalist Club, National Parks Association, Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association (ACKMA) and others. During the blockade in 1988 members from organisations such as the Rainforest Information Centre, Big Scrub Environment Centre, Greenpeace, Byfield Action Group, Wilderness Society and many other individuals not belonging to any organization, joined with members of CQSS, CCC, and WPS, to try and save Elephant Hole and Speaking Tube Caves from imminent destruction.

Since my previous article on the matter (ACKMA Journal # 33, December 1998), there have been further developments in the reconciliation process between Queensland Cement and Lime (QCL), and Pacific Lime –formally Central Queensland Cement (CQC), and the opponents of limestone mining in the Mount Etna Caves region. Even ten years after the 1988 Mount Etna blockade some people remained deeply affected by their experiences. Nonetheless, they have been able to put aside past differences and work together for a much greater good. A change of attitudes on both sides and a willingness to work together can achieve quite amazing results.

SOME PAST EVENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

The Mount Etna conflict escalated to an amazing and indeed frightening climax. It included a multitude of illegal and/or immoral actions by government, protesters and the company. It was marked by extreme levels of confrontation, personal violence, and prolonged legal action. It left many people with bitter memories and it would take a very large book to tell the whole story.

The adverse effects the blockade had on the lives of individuals and families who were attempting to save a national treasure was enormous. Several failed marriages, with others coming close, were partly due to involvement in the Mount Etna issue. There was tremendous pressure on families and for some children, whose parents were actively involved, and seen to be so, the peer pressure was horrendous. For company employees there was the fear of losing their livelihoods.

A NEW BEGINNING

Ten years have passed since the blockade and the company now has a completely new philosophy. Some very positive things towards reconciliation had already occurred, beginning when the Australasian Bat Conference (April 1998) was being organised and continuing afterwards (see ACKMA Journal # 33). The company was now seeking to close the files on the outstanding court judgements against some of the company's opponents as soon as possible (see QCL 1998 Environment Report).

CQSS had *closed the books* on Mount Etna several years previously (although some individuals had not), due to utter frustration, and had decided against being involved in the Australian Bat Conference due to Pacific Limes' sponsorship. Given past experiences, one can understand why they felt suspicious when approaches were made to them regarding the money still held in securities and other outstanding court matters. Chris White (Company Manager), after the trip into Resurrection Cave (June 1998) on which he accompanied CQSS Members, was able to arrange a meeting between the two parties to discuss these matters and negotiate an outcome that would be beneficial to the area and one that both parties could embrace.

CAMMOO CAVES - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Cammoo Caves, one of two tourist cave systems adjacent to Mt. Etna (the other being Olsen's Caves), had come up for sale several times during the past fifteen years. Local Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) staff had approached various owners about a possible government purchase. Unfortunately, each time it became available the Department did not have the funding to proceed, as many would have liked. At one time the funding that was available was used to buy another property. This property covered a much greater area for a similar outlay and had environmental values that were not already adequately represented in existing parks. Thus, its purchase was considered to be a higher priority. Cammoo Caves eventually sold once again into private ownership.

In 1996 when the Cammoo property again came on to the market, owners John and Eve Trenaman were again approached by QPWS. John and Eve were keen to sell the property at a fair price. For years conservationists had lobbied the department to buy Cammoo as an addition to the existing park and the idea also had some support within the Department. Unfortunately, once again the Department was unable to proceed with the purchase, causing considerable disappointment. Peter Berrill (CQSS President) later lobbied the Minister for the Environment, Rod Welford. At a *media afternoon* on 16 November 1999, the Minister said that when Peter first approached him he did not think the purchase would be possible.

THE CAMMOO PURCHASE - A BRIEF HISTORY OF EVENTS

The events related above regarding Cammoo, and events following, are two separate issues, but each have a bearing on the final outcome.

In 1997, a solicitor notified the company that bond money still held in securities from the court case was about to revert to the Crown. He inquired what QCL wanted to do. Martin Foreman (General Manager, North & Central QCL) and Chris White (Pacific Lime Manager) then approached conservation groups to ask about a research trust, or similar. Both being new to the company they were unaware of who they should approach.

By mid 1998, at the meeting with the company, Peter Berrill (CQSS) suggested the purchase of Cammoo Caves to be added to the Mount Etna Caves National Park.

By late 1998, the project between QCL and CQSS was finalised and additional funding sought. CQSS applied for a grant from the National Heritage Trust, Environment Australia. QCL wrote a letter of support for the project to give the grant application some added weight and offered to match the bond money with a contribution towards the purchase.

In early 1999 the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) and QPWS were approached with the Cammoo purchase proposal. The idea was for each party to put in equal amounts. QCL's contribution and bond money, the NHT grant to CQSS and the other third from the EPA.

Early to mid 1999, negotiations between EPA and the landowner began resulting in the purchase of Cammoo Caves for QPWS to be added to the Mount Etna Caves National Park. A block of land, fronting Pilkington Quarry adjoining the park, and owned by Pacific Lime, was also included in the deal. It was a truly remarkable outcome for all concerned and one that all players are very proud of.

"This initiative represents a partnership between QCL Group member company, Pacific Lime, the Central Queensland Speleological Society, and the Environmental Protection Agency. This partnership provides an excellent example of how industry, community groups and the government can work together for the benefit of the wider community." (quote from the official invitation).

In a letter sent by Chris White (Pacific Lime Manager) requesting us to participate in the open day he wrote: "The reason for having an open day is to try to show that all parties with interests in the Mount Etna area have moved from a position of conflict to one of cooperation around shared goals. This does not mean forgetting what happened in the past nor does it justify some of the actions taken during times of conflict. However, I believe there is now an opportunity to look towards a more positive future. We are making this approach to try to show that, in part because of the efforts of you and other opponents of the mining activities in 1988/89, we now share many of the views and values that you represented."

Thirty-seven years have now passed since the beginning of the issue and the changes that have occurred during the past two and a half years are nothing short of remarkable. Previously they would have been beyond anyone's wildest dreams or expectations. Some of the favourable outcomes

during this time have previously been outlined (see ACKMA Journal # 33) but it didn't finish there. No longer are there outstanding court costs against individuals and organisations, amounting to approximately \$300,000. Writs against organizations and individuals have been dropped. With contributions from the three previously mentioned parties, Cammoo Caves is now included in the Mount Etna Caves National Park. Where there was once bitter confrontation, people have worked together in cooperation and achieved the almost impossible. It has been a tremendous achievement all round and has brought considerable joy to everyone. John and Eve Trenaman were very pleased with the outcome, as were many in the local community. The results of reconciliation have been far reaching and are a great cause for celebration.

There may even be more great things to come. Chris White has some very positive ideas for the area and feels that a research project still has a lot of merit. He said that the company might be able to provide some funding each year towards a project of this kind. There is nothing definite, but it is an idea I am certain he will pursue.

It was hoped that the Minister, Rod Welford, would be able to make it to the open day celebration but this proved not to be possible. Instead, a *media afternoon* with the Minister was held on the 16th November. It was attended by QPWS employees, CQSS members, and representatives from QCL and Pacific Lime. The Minister was introduced by Don Cook, the Regional Manager of QPWS and speeches were given by representatives of all parties.

OPEN DAY CELEBRATIONS

The Official Handover to QPWS occurred at the *Open Day Celebrations* held at Cammoo Caves on 27 November. It marked an end of the Mount Etna conflict. The celebrations were to start at 2.30 pm and finish at 6.30 pm, but many arrived earlier and others, mainly cavers, continued until later.

The celebration was attended by between one hundred and fifty and two hundred people. They came from QCL, Pacific Lime, Environment Australia, QPWS, CQSS, and ASF. There were also representation from southern caving clubs, Capricorn Conservation Council, Wildlife Preservation Society, The Australasian Bat Society, and ACKMA, together with teachers and pupils from The Caves State School and their families, community members and many others. The official speeches were given by Chris White (Pacific Lime Manager), Bill Townsend (Managing Director QCL), Kate Mashford (Environment Australia), John Dunkley (ASF), Bill Fisher (Regional Service Director Central Region, QPWS) and Peter Berrill (President, CQSS)

Unfortunately a number of people who would have liked to be present were unable to attend due to other commitments. ACKMA members attending included Cameron James, Mary McCabe, Lana Little, Patrick Larkin, Joe and Dianne Vavryn, and Ann Augusteyn.

The afternoon was well attended by QPWS staff. Some employees were on duty assisting with the celebrations and conducting guided tours through Chandelier Cave. Tours were run every twenty minutes in groups of ten. As a safety measure

Cameron James (Ranger in Charge) arranged for helmets to be worn, some of which were provided by Pacific Lime. The tours proved to be very popular keeping Cameron and his team very busy for the majority of the afternoon. Two large marquees were erected for the occasion, with plenty of seating underneath – one provided by the QPWS and the other by QCL, together a large family tent supplied by CQSS.

A number of outstanding displays set up in the kiosk and barbecue area. QPWS had a display of Bat Cleft and off park conservation, together with a display by the Youth Conservation Corp and others. Pacific Lime's photo display included early historical photos and enlargements of photos taken by Joe Vavryn and Jeff Simmons. The CQSS display included a video depicting some of the past news items, newspaper clippings and T-shirts, etc.

Chris White had arranged with The Caves School

for the children to be involved in the celebrations and they did so in numerous ways. They had made making bats and bat drawings, etc. – most of which looked very professional, and prizes won for the best made and best drawn bats were well deserved. John McCabe gave out the prizes, donated by Pacific Lime, and the complimentary tickets to Bat Cleft were donated by QPWS.

Souvenir T-shirts with a photo of a ghost bat in flight on the back were also on offer, in return for an hour or two's work on the park. Towards the end of the function the "work for a shirt" idea had largely fallen by the way side, but a number of people had signed up.

The evening concluded with a barbecue. It was a very proud time for all concerned, and a great feeling by all involved that past conflicts were now put to rest.