

THE ACKMA JOURNAL MEMBER'S SURVEY

- Kent Henderson

I was not rushed off my feet with responses to the Survey, inserted last Journal. I received twenty-six responses, out of a membership of *circa* two hundred and fifty – just over a 10% return. One suspects the scarcity of response was either the lack of a replied paid envelope (!?), apathy, or perhaps that most members are deliriously happy with the Journal! Maybe some sort of combination? Still, 10% is possibly a reasonable sample, so let's look at the results...

The first question dealt with layout. Given past comments of more than some members concerning columnisation, I expected a "victory" in that area. In fact, eleven voted to retain the single column format, nine wanted two columns, one wanted three columns, and five had no opinion. Thus, if you are happy with "first past the post" voting, the status quo got up. Still, it was not a run away victory, and in response I am moved to use more two-column layouts in future.

On the borders question, I frankly did expect the "bats" to get canned. Not so. We have a lot of bat lovers in ACKMA, it would seem! Fifteen respondents voted to retain the bat borders, one voted for borders with no bats, two for top and bottom line borders only, and two had no opinion. A clear victory for the bats, or as one member commented: "Yea bats!!" So Kevin Kiernan, the bats stay (unless you want the Stals back? ...No, I didn't think so...)

The questions on content proved interesting, but again, very much for the status quo. On anecdotal articles, twenty thought the current proportion about right, two wanted more, three wanted less, and one had no opinion. A fairly overwhelming positive sentiment, it would seem.

On the question of cave/karst management articles, eleven wanted more, fourteen thought the current proportion about right, and one wanted less!! Given the nature and purpose of ACKMA, of course, this came as no shock. I am definitely in the "more" camp myself, the problem is getting you lot to write the articles! So if you want more, write them yourself and/or badger others. If you need help in badgering, let me know – it is probably one of my few skills!!

The question of scientific articles was a close-run thing. Thirteen thought the current proportion about right, eleven wanted more, and two wanted less. Certainly, there is scope for increasing the scientific content a bit, I feel – given the availability of papers, of course. I tend to work on the theory that if I, as a non-scientific person, can understand any particular offering, then perhaps our general, similarly-disposed, members will be able to do so as well.

The Committee Reports question was, again, pretty much for the status quo. A thumping nineteen respondents thought the current proportion about right, four wanted less, one more, one none (!), and one had no opinion. So, they stay.

And then we get to the Editorial questions, whereupon I did expect the "boots to put in". Maybe only my fan club responded? – which I had long since concluded would be lucky to fill a phone box. No one suggested that my editorial not appear (phew...!). Eleven wanted it to remain in the centre pages (Kevin Kiernan probably did a ring around for votes), while eight wanted it elsewhere in the Journal (at the front, judging by many comments), and seven had no opinion. I am pretty much inclined, therefore, to leave it where it is.

On the question of its "newsyness", the response was far more clear-cut. Nineteen thought the current proportion about right, one wanted it more newsy, one less newsy, and five had no opinion. I have always used my editorial to bring members "up to speed" with more immediate news snippets from around the place – information that in itself doesn't merit a full article. Yes, okay, I may have on occasions in the past gone a little "over the top" (I always get the message, one way or another!), but I have mellowed with age – haven't I? So, status quo voted for, and such will remain.

The questions on photos also generated a resounding vote for "steady as she goes". Twenty-five respondents thought the current proportion to be about right, and one wanted less photos. On the matter of the mix of photos and text, twenty-one thought the current mix to be appropriate, and five thought it could be better. Of the latter, the comments suggest dissatisfaction with the quality of photo reproduction in the last few editions. I'm with them – it has concerned me. The printers have moved from bromides to scanned images following a relatively recent equipment update. Depending somewhat on the originally quality of the scanned images, the final result has often been not good – as more than a few have noted. I have spoken to the printers, and where possible, we will be going back to bromides, so the quality of photos in this edition should exhibit a marked improvement.

On the final questions, the results we not particularly clear-cut. With respect to the occasional full-page photo spread, ten liked them on the cover and centre pages, seven on the cover only, one in the middle pages only, and eight had no opinion. As for having more full-page photo spreads, eleven voted yes, six voted no, and nine had no opinion. Of course, the limiting factor in this is always the availability of photos, which usually occurs only after a major event such as a Conference. I have had many positive comments on filling, one way or another, the front page with photos and this practice I am likely to continue. What I do try to do (anyone noticed?) is to ensure that there is at least one photo or diagram on every double page. I personally find this visually pleasing, and it does tend to break up the text.

Overall, it would appear that those who bothered to respond seem to be relatively happy with the Journal. I received many useful individual comments, for which I am grateful, and which I will take into account in future editions – assuming of course, you lot are masochistic enough to re-elect

me as Publications Officer! Andy sez he'll open my coffin every four months to get me to put the

Journal out even after I'm dead!! By then we'll need zombie borders, rather than bats!! Sigh...