

WHY BUCHAN?

- Kent Henderson

ACKMA has never visited Buchan (or Victoria, for that matter). In pre-ACKMA days, Buchan did host the *5th Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management* in 1983 – some seventeen years ago. If would, therefore, be fair to say that it has been a long time between drinks!

So what has happened at Buchan in the intervening period? Some might say not overly much, but that is not true – although compared to advances at many other cave locations, the claim could be made. But that is not the fault of staff. What is true is that Buchan has been starved of funding for capital works, possibly more so than at any other government-owned Australian cave location. There has been no “Wonambi” or “Caveworks” erected at Buchan, and no substantial capital funding for cave redevelopment and lighting. But yet, there have been positives. Except in the District Ranger position, Buchan has been blessed with a long-term, stable, core of dedicated staff, headed by still-current cave manager Dale Calnin, and supported long-term guides Jack Lewendon, John Rogerson, and Robyn Calnin.

ACKMA Life Member, Alan Costigan, who cared for Buchan as cave manager so well for many years, retired in the mid 1980s (we hope to see Alan at our AGM in June). He was followed by Graham Parkes, who proved the catalyst for many innovative changes, that will ever be his legacy. The first was facilitating the “Friends of Buchan Caves” group, which over the succeeding years has raised funds, obtained small grants, and been involved in track construction and maintenance in the Caves Reserve, signage procurement and erection, cave redevelopment, cave cleaning and re-lighting, amongst other projects. Graham also started the effort to remove excessive “chicken wire” in Fairy Cave, which has been

on ongoing focus – to the point where little remains today. Unfortunately, Graham eventually moved on, and most regrettably, Buchan has had no longer-term District Ranger since. However, the core staff mentioned above remained, but that is imminently to change. Led by Dale Calnin, and with the support of very limited capital works funding, and the “Friends”, the Fairy Cave has now been substantially re-lit, albeit with still a bit to achieve. The other tourist cave (Royal Cave) remains essentially as it was – basically untouched by capital funds for very many years.

And the future? Aside from what the “Friends” can and will achieve, one is not encouraged. Buchan has long been a “cash cow” to government consolidated revenue, with little returned. The current major problem is that Jack and John, who have contributed so much over many years, are all but retired, and Robyn Calnin is looking to move on. Future staffing is up in the air, and even so, finding people with the dedication and ability to go well beyond the call the duty, as they have done over the years, is axiomatic, at best.

So, why Buchan? Why attend the coming ACKMA AGM weekend there in June? Because Buchan is at the crossroads. It needs “the collective us” now, more than ever. ACKMA in Buchan will create a badly needed focus – for politicians, government bureaucrats, and the wider community. We are all aware of the beneficial effects, immediate and ongoing, that ACKMA attendance has on any cave area it officially visits, usually for a Conference. Buchan has not seen us for seventeen years, and it is vitally important that the most is made of our presence. In order to achieve this, clearly, it is most important that very ACKMA member who can possibly attend, does so.