

BUCHAN GETS ITS MONEY AT LAST!!

- Kent Henderson

Buchan has for too long been the “poor relation” of Show Caves in Australasia. It is the only main operation that has not seen any substantial capital injection in relatively recent years, either in one or more major hits (such as at Naracoorte, Augusta-Margaret River, Princess Margaret Rose, Cutta-Cutta, Wellington, Waitomo, and just recently, Hastings), or reasonable on-going, if sometimes intermittent, funding (such as at Wombeyan, Abercrombie or Jenolan). That is, until now.

ACKMA and other cave-related organisations have been calling for a major cash injection at Buchan for many years. One of the main reasons our 2000 AGM was held in Buchan was to assist in putting a much-needed focus on the area. In his address to our AGM last June, Stuart Ord (*Parks Victoria* Regional Manager for Eastern Victoria) noted that his department had applied for substantial infrastructure funding from the State Government (Pierce & Henderson, 2000) While this was welcomed by ACKMA members present, it was also noted with some scepticism – this sort of *wish list* has been heard before.

Before continuing, it would be unfair to state that Buchan has received no capital funding in recent times, but it has been relatively sparse, and thinly spread. The Fairy Cave has been largely updated with new tracking and lighting, but still with quite a bit to be done. Work has commenced in upgrading the sewerage system, a new Children’s playground has been installed, and quite some work has been done in walking track upgrading in the Caves Reserve. That said, the limited funds that have flowed have been eked out to their maximum by the labour of Buchan Caves staff, and *The Friends of Buchan Caves*. Without the dedication of both, far less would have been achieved. Even so, much is left to do. For example, the highest volume (in terms of visitation) show cave at Buchan (Royal Cave) has been virtually untouched in the modern era (Henderson, 2000).

Thus it was with great anticipation that I learned, a few days before the event, that the local State Member of Parliament for East Gippsland, Craig Ingram, was to attend Buchan Caves in Monday 6 November for a “Special Announcement”. Mr. Ingram is an independent member of State Parliament, upon whom (with two such others) the minority State Labor Government relies upon for its survival. He has recently been successful in

getting the State Government to substantially improve water flows in the long since degraded Snowy River, so his track record is good.

And his announcement? – \$600,000 from the Government’s Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF)!!! Hallelujah!!! The funding has been apportioned as follows:

- \$300,000 for an upgrading of the Buchan Caves Visitor Centre, which will include enhanced interpretative displays.
- \$200,000 for a lighting upgrade of Royal Cave, and providing a new cave communications system.
- \$100,000 to replace Bridge 1 in the Caves Reserve.

This RIDF funding, long overdue but very welcome, will go quite some way to bringing the infrastructure at Buchan up to the high standards now enjoyed at most other major cave locations in Australasia. Needless to say, the Buchan Caves Reserve Manager, Stephanie Finn and Caves and Karst Ranger, Dale Calnin, and their staff, are delighted – and it is just reward for their efforts, over many years, to keep Buchan Caves “afloat” under often difficult circumstances.

I spoke to Dale on the telephone the day after the “Special Announcement”. In Royal Cave, plans include removing its remaining “ancient” 32v lighting and transformers and updating to 240v, drainage improvements, and chicken wire removal where possible. Dale is planning to visit Jenolan and Wombeyan in the near future to consult on recent lighting developments at both locations. He is also hoping for a bit of residue from the funding to divert into Federal Cave (a former show cave in the Reserve) to begin its conversion to a low visitation self-guided cave, as well as more work in Fairy Cave. In terms of the new visitor centre, extending the current “kiosk” is the main option to be examined. The funding must be expended within three years, and it is currently planned to close Royal Cave after Easter next year to effect its transformation. Further reports of progress on the upgrades will appear in the ACKMA Journal in future editions.

REFERENCES:

- Pierce, M. & Henderson, K. W. *ACKMA at Buchan*. ACKMA Journal No. 40, September 2000. p. 9-11.
Henderson, K. W. *Why Buchan?* ACKMA Journal No. 38, March. 2000. p. 29.