

# EDITORIAL RAMBLINGS

For those who weren't there (and for whom I have sympathy) – need you ask!?! The Wombeyan Conference was stunning! Conferences in more recent years have been ever more superbly organised, but Mick Chalker, together with Andy Spate, have really turned Conference organisation into an art form. Tremendous job, fellas!! A full report is elsewhere in these pages (is the Pope a Catholic?), as well as a few words from Arthur Clarke on the Post Conference Study Tour to Yarrangobilly-Coolleman – another Andy Spate-inspired success!! Unfortunately, work commitments prevented me from attending the latter (Andy almost turned to religion when he heard!), but such is life!

What I will NOT be missing, and no member can possibly miss, is the next (15th) Conference at Chillagoe and Undara. It will be unspeakably fantastic – Chillagoe, with some the best tower karst you will ever see, and Undara with arguably the biggest, and definitely the best, lava caves in the world. And then, just up the road are the Daintree, and the Great Barrier Reef. This conference just CANNOT be missed. The early word is a large overseas attendance is at very short odds....!!! The Draft Program for Chillagoe-Undara is elsewhere herein. Go Lana, Val and Dave!!! As a matter of interest, the 2005 (16th) Conference has been awarded to the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island. I am reliably informed, even at this early stage, that Buchan will be bidding for the 2007 (17th) Conference....

Our retiring (sic) President, Brian Clark, had a note from Bob and Viv Peters (managers of Princess Margaret Rose Caves in Western Victoria) just before the Wombeyan Conference – apologising for non-attendance. The news from PMR is that Bob and Viv's partner of several years, Karen Mackereth, is "retiring" to have a family. The new partners to Bob and Viv in running PMR are (from 20 April) Allen and Sandra Woodham. I am sure all members will join me in wishing Karen all the best with motherhood, and Allen and Sandra similarly for the challenges they have ahead!!

As members will recall, reports in recent Journal editions have focused on the Cape Range Karst mining issue in Western Australia. Rauleigh Webb now advises (11 May) that he has received a letter from the W. A. Minister for the Environment, Hon. Judy Edwards, indicating that she did not accept the Australian Speleological Federation's (ASF's) argument that the level of assessment should be raised from a PER to PUEA (Proposal Unlikely to be Environmentally Acceptable), BUT she did accept our argument regarding raising the level of assessment to ERMP (Environmental Review and Management Program). This will at least ensure that a higher level of assessment is made prior to any decision being made regarding the environmental impacts of the proposed mine at

Cape Range. The public comment period will also be longer at ten weeks of public review period.

Rauleigh would particularly like to thank those people/groups who wrote letters appealing at the Level of Assessment regarding the proposed mine at Cape Range, and to again thank the Environmental Defenders Office in Perth that was of great assistance in the ASF's objection to the Level of Assessment.

I was talking to Buchan Caves Senior Ranger, Dale Calnin, the other day. He and Stephanie Finn (Buchan Ranger-in-Charge) had a great time at the Conference, and they are now gearing up for some major capital works. John Cunningham, a departmental Capital Works Project Officer, is into full swing with the coming re-lighting of Royal Cave at Buchan. He has recently been to Jenolan and Wombeyan, and has consulted extensively, in particular, with Mick Chalker. A full infrastructure and lighting plan will be developed in coming months, with the project scheduled to commence straight after Easter 2002. Wonderful (and long awaited) stuff!

A big welcome to the Committee to our new ACKMA Officer Bearers who were elected at the recent AGM at Wee Jasper. As you'll note, Mia Thurgate as changed roles, Dr. Grant Gartrell has become "real" Treasurer, and our new committee people are Peter Dimond as President, Cameron James as Executive Officer, and Jackie Taylor as Information Officer (Australia) & Assistant Executive Officer. I am sure all members will wish them well. A report each from Peter and Cameron is to be found elsewhere herein, both of which are partly introductory for those members who don't know them. Jackie Taylor has recently been quite ill, and most unfortunately had to miss the Wombeyan Conference. I'll see if I can induce her to write a few words in the next Journal....!

Our new President, Peter ("a girl's best friend") Dimond is well known to most members, having previously served as Vice President and Conference Convenor. He is an outstanding choice, and will undoubtedly fulfil his duties with great distinction. I can recall many famous sayings issuing from Peter's mouth over the years. However, possibly the most memorable was reported to me by several breathless Kiwis upon their arrival at the Wombeyan Conference. Peter had organized many of the large New Zealand contingent into a bus up from Sydney. Some of the Kiwis wished to stop en route at the odd (sic) Australian pub to quench their thirst, while others wanted, instead, to press on. Peter, his great presence looming over various hapless kiwis, stated: "If you don't stop, then you'll never get there". They stopped (of course!). Profound words indeed, and a measure of the authority Peter will bring to ACKMA's top job!

It would be very remiss of me not to mention our retiring Office Bearers. Brian Clark has served as President for the last two years with a great deal of distinction, and not without some difficulties (me probably being his main one!) and several major

problems – which he solved with skill and flair. We are most indebted him. Brian does remain on the Committee as Immediate Past President. Mick Chalker retires as an Office Bearer after many years of service in one role or another – all performed superbly. His service and dedication was rewarded at the recent AGM when he was elevated, by acclamation, to ACKMA Life Membership, a rare honour and most thoroughly deserved in his case. At the same meeting Peter Chandler, who continues as our NZ Vice President, was made a Fellow of ACKMA – also richly merited.

Greg Martin leaves the Committee after some years of service – the last four as President and Immediate Past President. He has done a stunning job for ACKMA, and will continue as an ACKMA father-figure in New Zealand for many years to come. Greg is a quiet achiever, and there are very few people one meets in life about which you never hear a bad word spoken. Greg is one of those rare individuals, who is widely respected and admired.

We have also lost, in Dennis Rebechhi, the world's greatest Treasurer!! – and the recent Annual General Meeting passed a specific *Motion of Thanks* to Dennis for his work over the last eight years. As one who worked with Dennis closely over those years, his efforts were indeed exemplary. The success of ACKMA, more than many will ever know, is very much a result of his efforts. He is an incredibly hard act to follow, but I have no doubt Grant Gartrell is up to it! Arthur Clarke served only one year on the Committee in the role of ACKMA's ASF Liaison Officer – deciding not to re-stand for the position (which as now been annexed to Grant Gartrell). Arthur did an excellent job under quite difficult personal circumstances as it turned out, and he has our thanks for all his efforts.

Also retiring, after several years in the role, was Robyn McBeath as our Australian Vice President. Again, Robyn has filled that position with distinction, although the pressures of work, I know, have not left her with the time I am certain she would have ideally liked to have devoted to the role. Those work pressures saw her miss the Wombeyan Conference, but hopefully she'll be at Chillagoe-Undara! We thank her and wish her well.

Last but not least, Professor Dave Gillieson has retired as our Executive Officer, facing the same sorts of work pressures as Robyn. Dave has been an outstanding Executive Officer, bringing great abilities and karst knowledge to this crucial role. However, Dave will be a key figure on the Organizing Committee for the next Conference, so we have certainly not heard the last of him!!

As a penultimate comment, I recently received a newspaper cutting (*Waikato Times* – 20 April 2001) from Greg Martin, plus an accompanying cartoon, detailing a row between the Waitomo community and the District Council. All good clean fun (!) The cutting and cartoon are adjacent.

And finally: Chihuahua, Mexico is home to two hot caverns containing the largest natural crystals known to man (so it is reported, anyway...). Some of its clear crystals of selenite are over twenty feet long. The newly discovered caverns, some 1200 feet below the surface, carry a *curse* for those who seek to plunder their riches. A man recently tried to steal one of the magnificent selenite crystals from the roof, and might have succeeded if he hadn't stood directly beneath it while chopping it free. He was crushed by the sparkling stalactite as it heeded the call of gravity....