

THE WOMBEYAN CONFERENCE AND STUFF LIKE THAT!!!

**(A family Gathering – full of earthly apertures, mother-in-laws,
education, libation and obesity)**

- Kent Henderson

Stunning as! This is probably getting a very tired cliché, but it is still hard to go past it for the Wombeyan Conference. I wound my way to Wombeyan from Melbourne on Sunday 29 April, arriving early afternoon. Mick Chalker and Andy Spate weren't quite running around like headless chooks, but it is fair to say there was some activity happening! Having shoved Conference Handbooks in delegates "showbags" it was up to the Conference area to effect registrations in the late afternoon and early evening, and to welcome many old friends, and new faces. In having been around ACKMA just a couple of footy seasons, it was great to welcome the many old stagers turning up, and more particularly, the thirty first timers (out of a total of over eighty delegates). And so they rolled in! ...Including (a bit late – there are several pubs between Sydney and Wombeyan) a bus full of New Zealanders. The evening featured a most pleasant barbeque, considerable libation and back slapping, and interesting slide show by Ernst Holland on the karst areas of New South Wales – featuring the photos (mostly) of well-known NSW caver, Stephen Babka.

Monday 30 April saw the first full Conference Day, with a welcome and general housekeeping by Mick and Andy after breakfast, followed by the Official Opening by Professor Richard Mackay, the recently-appointed new Chairman of the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust. His thoughtful address was very well received. Thereupon the first paper session of the Conference followed, with four excellent offerings. Leading off was Dr. Armstrong Osborne with his keynote address: *New Science of Eastern Australian Caves: Implications for Management and Interpretation*. Armstrong propounded a new scientific view of these caves which is currently developing and which recognises, and attempts to account for evidence for many phases of cave development occurring over hundreds of millions of years, exposure of palaeokarst deposits in caves (unusual on an international scale), cave development in steeply dipping limestone, poor relationship between surface and underground geomorphology, poor relationship between surface and underground drainage, unusual patterns of cave development, including downward-narrowing caves, development of blind "passages" (halls) and cupolas, and unusual mineral assemblages.

Armstrong went on to note that this new science suggests that rising ground water, rather than sinking surface water, played a significant role in cave development; that sinking streams have largely modified the caves, rather than formed them; that sediment blockage and paragenesis have played an important role in the development of both surface

and underground landscapes; and that many of the features of the caves result from processes that were active hundreds of millions of years ago.

He further noted that management and interpretation of caves appears to rest on two assumptions – that surface catchment management is the key to conservation, and that we currently know what the significant features of the caves are, and are conserving and interpreting them.

Armstrong then moved on to state that new science challenges both of these views. If key features of the cave are the products of non-meteoritic processes in the distant past, then managing the catchment (while an important conservation tool in its own right) will not conserve them. If the internationally significant features of the caves are not recent speleothems, but fragile mud deposits (possibly hundreds of millions of years old) and strange, fragile, mineral deposits, then our lack of knowledge of them (and the water cleaner) poses the greatest threat to their survival. The new science suggests that inventory studies (and significance-based management and interpretation, following the Australian Natural Heritage Charter) are urgently required for best-known caves in eastern Australia, particularly if we have World Heritage listing in mind.

Well!! An excellent and perhaps controversial paper to start the Conference, and Armstrong received more than a few questions! And to keep the ball really rolling, next up was Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith, AM, with *Cave Management in the New Millennium*. In it Elery assesses the impact of Globalisation on the management of public lands. He suggests that resources for public land management are being reduced; managers are expected to become entrepreneurs who earn their own funding; but meanwhile, poverty is increasing so a large number of people are being excluded from public land access by increased visitor fees and travel costs. He made some interesting suggestions for effective responses to these changes, and again, attracted quite a number of questions after his address.

Penny Davidson, a PhD student presently doing field work at Jenolan, was next cab off the rank. Her outstanding paper, *The Social Dimensions of Karst Tourism: Incorporation into Management Strategies*, is especially published elsewhere in this journal, so I will not attempt to paraphrase it here. Penny was followed by an offering from John Dunkley, entitled: *Questioning the Guiding Assumptions of Cave Management* (or alternatively: *Don't Forget the Guide*). John summarised the

assumptions or guiding (sic) principles on which 'traditional' cave management appears to have been practiced in recent years, as he sees them. He suggests some 'principles' are simplistic and lack sound intellectual foundation, and suggests a number of strategies to fix the problem.

After our initial sumptuous lunch, it was on to our first afternoon of field trips. Delegates had two options, either show caves or wild caves. On the wild caving side, groups visited Bullio Cave, and one smaller group did Sigma Cave. The tourist cave people (the majority of delegates) firstly tramped the karst above Wollondilly Cave to inspect surface features. I led a small group into Koorlinga Cave (we later did Wollondilly), while other groups did Wollondilly and Junction Caves. Most groups finished off coming back through the self-guided Fig Tree Cave. The recently refurbished Junction and Fig Tree Caves were mostly favourably commented on by many a cave manager – in particular their new lighting, and many questions were generated (pun intended!) concerned the type of lighting systems, how they operated and their management. Delegates were most impressed with the results achieved in both caves.

The Wollondilly cave trips also took in the Mulwaree (Show) Cave, and David's Cave and Coronation Cave sections – the latter old tourist sections (unlit). Groups were led by such experts as Mick Chalker himself, Armstrong Osborne and Ernie Holland. Wonderful stuff – a bit like being shown around Buckingham Palace by the Queen (although our palaces are infinitely better decorated!!).

After dinner, our incoming Executive Officer, Cameron James, chaired the second paper session of the Conference. John Dunkley was first up with his second offering – *Thoughts on Interpreting Cave History*, in which he explored how cave history can be usefully and meaningfully incorporated into cave interpretation. He was followed by one of New Zealand's most engaging "karst fossils", Derek Mason, who enlightened us on *The New Zealand Resource Management Act. What it is, what it does, can it protect the environment for the management of caves?* It proved an interesting paper, and generated several questions in comparing the Australian situation. Our final paper in this session was an Arthur Clarke offering: *Cone karst, Caves, Cave fauna and Karst Management in Guangxi and Zhejiang provinces of southern China*. In an excellent powerpoint presentation, Arthur noted that Management of caves and karst in Southern China tends to be conducted under the many levels of government from a national, provincial, county or town municipalities, with some levels of co-ordination within these bodies. There is little apparent interest in the long term conservation of caves, protection of speleothems or protection of endangered species and after two decades of tourist cave management – where the tourist income dollar appears to be the major driving force – many show caves are showing signs of obvious neglect.

Warm fires, a late night, and consequential significantly increased brewery profits, as well as

sleep deprivation for some – led onto Day Two of the Conference. May Day 2001 started with the Third Paper Session, chaired by Professor Elery Hamilton Smith, AM; with six offerings to come. The session opened with *Management of "wild" caves in New South Wales* (by Andy Spate, Brian Richardson and Steve Reilly) and presented by Andy Spate. There are more than 100 caving areas recognised in New South Wales, and the paper described the range of the management practices and styles used in the State and discussed some of the issues confronting its cave managers. Major issues included the very high visitor pressures on some cave areas such as Wee Jasper and Bungonia, the remoteness of other sites such as Stockyard Creek and Indi, and traditional patterns of uncaring use in many areas.

Dr. Neville Michie followed with *Radical reduction of cave impacts – the direction for the future*. This was a radical paper indeed, with Neville discussing choices of materials, and his philosophy of sustainable cave exploitation. Third up was Jenolan Caves Manager, Steve Reilly, with his stimulating *Addressing the failures of cave access control systems: A vision for protecting wild cave values*. In it he questions the somewhat prevailing cave classification system. He argues that in many cases the values of caves remain unknown despite increasing use and impact from mainly recreational access. He proposes that shared vision for the protection of karst values needs to be held by managers, cave users, governments and the wider public. Recommended initiatives involve taking a precautionary approach to cave access until cave values are assessed, elevating public and government awareness of karst values, more effective training of cave users and clarification of the role of cave users in recognition and documentation of cave values.

After a voluminous morning tea, our outgoing President, Brian Clark, PSM, took over as Session Chairperson, for the next three papers. Leading off was Ann Wood with: *Recent developments in management of wild caves in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park*. She gave a brief overview of the history of cave use in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge, and the "Cave and Abseil Permit System" which was introduced in 1992, and its subsequent review. She also explained the recent introduction of CALM's Cave Leader Course. The fifth paper of the morning came from our two distinguished American delegates, Tom Rea and Kriste Lindberg. Tom was already well known by most of us, this being his second ACKMA Conference, while it was Kriste's first visit down under. Their paper – *Caver ownership and management of Sullivan Cave: a wild cave in Indiana, USA* – was fascinating, and accompanied with some great visuals. Caver ownership of caves (though not caver management) as such, is virtually unknown in our part of the world. Tom and Kriste discussed the purchase and management of Sullivan Cave by the Indiana Karst Conservancy, describing the cave, its recent history and outlining the management guidelines and practices that the Conservancy has established for it. The session concluded with John and Glenda Wylie, of the Sydney Speleological Society (SSS),

delivering a paper on SSS's *Contribution to Speleology for the Use and Management of Wild Caves*. The paper covered the whole gamut of cave endeavour – and illustrated a very significant contribution by SSS over many years.

Following another stunning lunch, it was back to field tripping – the reverse of the former afternoon: Show Caves and Wild Caves. Some who have visited wild caves yesterday choose tourist caves on this occasion, and vice versa, while there were some who visited show caves and wild caves exclusively on both days. In addition to further trips to Bullio Cave, a trip was also run to Basin Cave – the latter of which attracted me. I hadn't been in Basin Cave for about 10 years, so it was time to return, I felt. In our group we had such luminaries as Peter Chandler, Phil Wood, Dianne Vavryn, Barry Richard and Grant Gartrell, with David Smith and Simon Chalker as our able trip leaders. Basin is a former tourist cave (many eras ago...). Its big claim to fame is a series of very large rimpool dams. Thanks David and Simon for a great trip – everyone was impressed!!

The evening (after yet another massive feast) was supposed to be free for delegates – other than for the ACKMA Committee, which was due to meet. However, an impromptu paper or two was put on, I understand (I was at the Committee meeting), including a colourful address by Kriste Lindberg on the Indiana Karst Conservancy. The Committee Meeting proved a fairly long one, but all issues were happily resolved!

Wednesday 2 May started off with the Conference's Fourth, and penultimate, paper session. We were to be blessed with another six papers, with our Immediate Past President, Greg Martin, chairing the first three. First up were Ernst_Holland and Mia Thurgate with their offering: *Was Karren one of The Sisters?* Unfortunately, Mia (our incoming Australian Vice President) missed the Conference with a back injury (she's OK now), but Ernie delivered the full paper in his usual inimitable style.

"The Sisters" are two adjacent limestone bluffs in the Borenore karst near Orange, New South Wales. This impounded karst has a surface expression of about 1500 hectares and is largely private property apart from an area of 69 hectares managed by the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust. In the paper Ernst and Mia demonstrate that the outcrops exhibit karst features that may give evidence of the more recent geomorphic history of the Borenore area. I personally found the paper particularly interesting, not only for the excellent visuals presented, but because I had been to the site in a field trip during the Wellington Karst Studies Seminar in February 2000.

Next up was a paper by Tim Stokes & Paul Griffiths (and presented by Tim) entitled: *Karst Inventory Standards and Vulnerability Assessment Procedures for British Columbia: A Canadian Approach to Managing Forested Karst Lands*. Tim was our lone Canadian delegate, but of course, his back-home associate Paul Griffiths is well known to many of us

(Paul was at the 1999 Mt. Gambier Conference). The paper dealt succinctly, and with great visuals, with the set of karst inventory standards and vulnerability assessment procedures that have recently been developed for British Columbia, Canada. The prime purpose of these standards and procedures are to provide a systematic methodology for evaluating karst landscape and ecosystems so that they can be carefully and effectively managed throughout the province.

Cameron James provided the third paper of the day, on *Habitat recovery at the karst surface, Mt Etna Caves National Park*, which was well presented, and I personally found intensely interesting. He planned to deal with two natural resource management programs that have recently been pursued on Mt Etna Caves National Park to assist in habitat recovery. The first of these has begun to accelerate the return of the dry rainforest communities to the karst by replanting with local species. The second was the locally contentious issue of fox control. Given time restraints, he was only able to cover the latter, but his full paper in the published *Proceedings* of the Conference (which will come out later this year).

The final paper prior to morning tea came from ASF Vice President, Peter Dykes, entitled: *Karst Vegetation in the Macquarie Catchment of Central Western New South Wales – A Status Report*. This was a interesting offering indeed, but as Elery has reviewed the Report elsewhere in this Journal, I will not comment further here.

The Session continued after morning tea with three more papers, under the chairpersonship of Steve Reilly. The initial offering here was by Andy Spate, Jane Gough, Julie Bauer, Peter Bauer, Mike Lake, Brian Richardson and Jackie Taylor: *Hardening of cave entrances at Bungonia State Recreation Area* (presented by Andy, assisted by Jane). Andy explained that there are nearly 200 caves managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service at the Bungonia State Recreation Area (Bungonia Caves) which are amongst the most heavily used "wild" caves in Australasia. The heavy use, coupled with the topography, soils and climatic conditions, has led to very considerable degradation and instability of cave entrances. The paper discussed the problems that have arisen at a number of cave entrances at Bungonia and outlines some of the possibilities and solutions that have been adopted for their management. Many of these were subsequently inspected by delegates on site the following day.

The next offering for the Session came from Dr. David Merritt, of the University of Queensland, entitled: *Identification and management of Australian Glow worms*. It is not everyday that a paper can get all the Kiwis sitting up straight together, but we were talking their language here!! (well, sort of...) Even so, the paper, which dealt with surveying and monitoring various Australian glow worm sites, was of general interest, and very well presented – although when David stated "It is likely that glow worm eco-tourism will expand in the

future, and caves in Tasmania have the potential to rival Waitomo Caves in New Zealand as large scale tourism attractions”, the Kiwis snorted bemusedly (of course!)

The last paper for the session came from Annalisa Contos, Julia James, Peter Rogers and Phil Prust (presented by Annalisa): *Challenges in the conservation of microbial mantles in Nullarbor caves*. It was an interesting offering focusing on novel microbial communities under the Nullarbor – ‘microbial mantles’ comprising sheets or tongues of mucoid material in which small crystals are embedded. It was noted that this novel and poorly understood community requires an extensive study of the nature of the different organisms within the community, the role the community plays in speleogenesis and their ability to regenerate after being disturbed. Conservation of the mantles, giving extensive cave diving in many locations, was identified as a pressing issue.

The afternoon field trip that followed yet another extravagant lunch was a highlight of the Conference. All delegates, in various groups, were bussed off to the Wombeyan Marble Quarries for extensive on-site interpretation. Happily, the quarrying is now permanently discontinued, but the quarries themselves, the infrastructure, and still in-situ machinery provided intense interest. Thereafter delegates undertook a long “forced march” across the karst, the good walk doing everyone’s waistlines much good. The walk terminated at the head of the spectacular Mares Forest Creek gorge, where we witnessed Steve Bourne’s Karst Kamikaze Squadron arrive, and promptly dive into the water. The aerial acrobatics of some was breathtaking! John Ash’s double somersault (with pike) belly flop was particularly memorable!! Undoubtedly the groups swim down the gorge was as “brass monkey” as it looked!!

Late afternoon this day was scheduled the eagerly awaited New Zealand versus Australia Cricket Match (underarm bowling only!). Sadly, it was cancelled. Who cancelled it remains unclear, but a rumour of cowering kiwis prostrating themselves in fear before Mick Chalker couldn’t possibly be correct (could it?). Maybe the non-invertebrate amongst them will demand a match at Chillagoe in two years time!?!

The day was topped off by a visit to the Taralga pub for dinner – yet another expansive feast. Of course, we all know what happens when ACKMA Conference Delegates are put in front of a bar, don’t we? Yes, you’re correct, brewery shares skyrocket!! The evening featured the presentation of the *President’s Award* to Steve Bourne for the best paper in the ACKMA Journal (1999-2001) by, funnily enough, the President – one of Brian Clark’s last official acts – although presenting it to one of his own staff was a minor embarrassment, until it was noted that Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith was the judge. Speaking of the latter, several tributes were made to Elery upon his award of the Order of Australia, accompanied by a sustained standing ovation by all present. Fitting indeed, and a few

more words about Elery and his award are elsewhere in this Journal. For the record, Steve’s award winning article was: *Presenting World Heritage Values to the Visitor* (ACKMA Journal No. 38 – March 2000)

The trip back to Wombeyan on the main bus was slightly riotous, with some outrageous character dragging various people to the microphone to sing or tell a yarn. A few good voices were discovered, along with many unfortunate ones. Another bus, containing bar stragglers, arrived back quite late, I’m told.... I’m also told that for some, our last night at Wombeyan was, in fact, a very early (or is that late?) morning.....

So, Thursday 3 May saw us all breakfast and pack up early and drive to Goulburn to Trappers Motel, where we left all our cars, and hopped on the buses for Bungonia (Caves) State Recreation Area. We arrived late morning and immediately commenced another forced route march to Adam’s Lookout, and then via Green’s Track to The Lookdown. The karst vistas were wonderful, and eagerly interpreted by Andy Spate in full cry! After a pleasant lunch in the car park, Andy summarily broke delegates into a number of small groups to go cave entrance jumping to view various engineering karst feats – occasioned by “over use” of many caves. Interesting discussions took place on the problems, and the methods of addressing them, with various constructive suggestions put forward. Various earthly apertures were inspected including Putrid Pit, Canberra Hole, Steampipe, Hogans Hole, Fossil Cave, Argyle Hole, Blowfly Cave, and Grill Cave. A number of people were present to lead the many small groups. These were (), and we are most grateful to them all for assisting.

By the end of the cave entrance tour, delegates were quite holed-out, so it was back in the buses and off to visit to Old Goulburn Brewery. And yes, it contained a bar! As the Old Goulburn Brewery proceeded to make a goodly part of its annual profit, there were some delegates (admittedly) who did wander around the museum part of the edifice, which was indeed well put together and of great historical interest.

In having finally poured the delegates back onto the buses, we eventually made it back to our quite luxurious accommodation at Trapper’s Motel in Goulburn. After an amazingly expansive dinner that evening, it was time for Brian Clark’s party games, which consisted of holding a coin between ones buttocks, and walking to deposit the same (by widening one’s buttock grip) into a glass on the floor. Let me tell you, this exercise requires consummate skill, which many a delegate did not possess! The hilarity generated was quite exceptional, with the eventual winner being either Nick White or Tom Rea, I seem to recall. The other entertainment for the evening was Arthur Clarke and his laptop projector showing every digital image he has captured thus far during the Conference (more than a few!!)

And so to Friday 4 May, the last full day of the Conference! Again it was an early breakfast, and then to Yass to deposit our cars at the Sundowner Motor Inn, whence it was back on the buses to head to Wee Jasper. We alighted into the Wee Jasper hall mid morning for the ACKMA Annual General Meeting, and final paper session. The AGM ran smoothly and the new office bearers for the next twelve months elected. Once again (unfortunately) there was only one nomination per position, so elections were not necessary. The full details of the new Committee are published at the rear of this Journal, so I will not repeat the names here. As noted in my Editorial herein, Mick Chalker was elected a Life Member of ACKMA, and Peter Chandler a Fellow.

Next year's ACKMA Annual General Meeting will be held at Yarrangobilly Caves, New South Wales, on weekend of the 11 – 12 May 2002.

After an expansive morning tea, Andy Spate chaired us through the three remaining papers. First up was Professor Soo Jin Kim, of Seoul University, South Korea, with his compelling paper: *Origin of speleothems on a lava cave from Jela Island, Korea*. It was a gem, and his visuals were stunning. His paper centred on a small lava tunnel ("Dangcheomul Cave") on Jela Island, south of the Korean mainland, which is overlain with quaternary aeolian shell sand formation, and as a result is packed with various forms of calcite speleothem.

Next up was the inimitable John Ash, who gave us a paper on his passion for the *Ruakuri Cave Redevelopment, Waitomo, New Zealand* (and stuff like that). He took us on a journey through the history of the cave (and stuff like that), what has happened in more recent times since its closure as a show cave (and stuff like that), and his hopes for the future reopening of the cave to tourism (and stuff like that). Wonderful stuff (like that)!

And so to the final Conference paper (the 23rd – phew...!) presented by Steve Bourne, entitled: *The development of Cathedral Cave, Naracoorte, for guided tours*. This excellent paper covered history of Cathedral Cave, past and present, focusing on its recent management in graffiti removal, cleanup of the entrance chamber, the rehabilitation of the cave after the pine tree removal, the construction of an access suitable for the visiting public and ultimately the opening of the cave for guided torch light tours.

After a massive luncheon provided by "the local ladies" (it would seem), it was off to view the local karst and Carey's Cave. The caterers had managed to capture and kill, it would seem, every chook (that's 'chicken' for American readers) within a hundred kilometre radius of Wee Jasper – all of which were on the tables in front of us for lunch. Amazing. Before moving on I must comment on the Conference food – I have used every superlative I could think off above. As is traditional at ACKMA Conferences, delegates are always VERY well fed – one inevitably leaves a Conference to immediately book in at a weight loss clinic. But Wombeyan was even more exceptional than usual. The quality and

particularly the quantity of food were legion. Our grateful thanks go to all our caterers for a job well done (or too well done!)

Upon our arrival at Carey's Cave we were met by the one and only Geoff Kell, and his wife Suzanne, who lead us through the tourist cave in two groups. I am certain there were no delegates who were unimpressed with their dedication to what is a very appealing cave. Geoff has particularly captured the school market, and his educational programs are attracting school groups from very long distances. We did get to see where the "rock" fell in the entrance of the cave, blocking it, as reported in the last ACKMA Journal.

Thus it was that we returned to Yass and our motel, and the famed Conference Dinner. Most people, as is custom, dressed up for the occasion (or dressed up more than usual, shall we say...). It was a superb feed, of course, but we were particularly honoured to have the Honorable Tim Moore present to be our after dinner speaker, with his subject: *Parliamentary colleagues and other troglodytes I have known*. Tim is a former New South Wales Environment Minister, and is a member of ACKMA. His address was to say the least, most entertaining, and we are most grateful to him for taking the time to join us.

And of course, there were the Conference Awards. John Ash acted as Master of Ceremonies (and stuff like like), ably assisted by Brian Clark. Virtually all our overseas delegates seemed to get an award (not the Kiwis though!) – of various cave kitsch items. A fun night, and certainly one of the best ever Conference dinners – to top off one of the best ever ACKMA Conferences. Mick and Andy (and not forgetting Annette Chalker, who lost much hair and often her sense of humour – both now returned! – in helping Mick organise the Conference), you did us all proud!! Many, many thanks from all delegates!!! Also, let's not forget the staff at Wombeyan, Bungonia and Wee Jasper who in ways large and small, assisted. Our grateful thanks to everyone.

As I said at the start of this dirge, it was great to catch up with the old stagers, and more particularly, meet the thirty first timers delegates. Much past experience suggested to me that these new chums would go away wedded to ACKMA, so to speak, having had a marvellous time, learnt heaps of new karsty things, and most importantly made lots of new karsty friends. ACKMA Conferences have a certain magic to them. It is, verily, a great family gathering – the old timers renewing age-old friendships, the new comers being very warmly welcomed into that circle. This is undoubtedly one of the keys to ACKMA's success over the years – that massive network of interpersonal relationships it has engendered, without doubt, an incredible positive effect on the conservation and development of the karst heritage of Australia and New Zealand, and beyond....

All that was left was to drive, on Saturday morning, to the historic Cooma Cottage, just out of Yass, for a wonderful (yet again!) breakfast put on by NSW

National Parks and Wildlife Service staff (thanks guys!!), and a pleasant tour of the old homestead. And then to the hardest part – the goodbyes – although some were heading off on a Post Conference Study Tour, either to Yarrangobilly-Coolman, or Abercrombie-Jenolan. Still, only two years till the next Conference – often described as a family gathering full of earthly apertures, mother-in-laws*, education, libation and obesity!! Or as

someone else once said: “Life is but one ACKMA Conference to the next....!!” See you at Chillagoe/Undara!!

*One comment on an ACKMA Conference, the mutterer of which I have forgotten, is that for a cave manager to have ACKMA turn up at his patch is like having 80 mother-in-laws descend on him at once!