

ANOTHER BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY!

- Andy Spate

about whether I was at *Kosu Cave* or *Gosudonggul*. They turned out to be the same place!

Filled out another application for leave and off to Korea! After a surprise phone call from Celery Reckons and much toing and froing with various people via email and fax, I am invited to attend and give a paper at the second Seminar for Preservation of Natural Heritage conducted by the Korean Cultural Properties Administration. Paper duly drafted and dispatched, slides and overheads prepared, plane bookings made, world in chaos after World Trade Centre tragedy, US dollars purchased at ridiculous prices and a remarkable dose of flu caught, and I am ready to depart on Sunday 21 October – RTA as we say in Antarctic-speak (Return To Australia) an action-filled week later.

Overall impressions of Korea:

- ☐ Food – wonderful (although not to all tastes)
- ☐ People – friendly, helpful
- ☐ Population – large so big crowds and “interesting” developments
- ☐ Rooms – overheated (and not only by my standards!)
- ☐ Scenery – wonderful mountains draped in autumn colours amid the fir trees
- ☐ Caves – great but only saw half the country's show caves
- ☐ Next year's Cave Expo – WOW! (A look at <http://caveexpo.or.kr> is highly recommended)
- ☐ Road system – mind-boggling
- ☐ Traffic – interesting at times
- ☐ Cement plants – many and huge
- ☐ History and historic places and museums – fascinating!
- ☐ Price of beer – variable! Quality excellent!
- ☐ Coffee – aficionados will not be happy – especially away from Seoul.

A note on place names:

- ☐ *Gul* means cave in Korean.
- ☐ *Dong* means cave in Japanese
- ☐ The two are often used together as in *Cheongokcheonyeondonggul* (also known as *Cheongok Lime Cave*).
- ☐ The transliteration problems means that there can be confusion about which cave you are at. For example, I was confused

The Seminar was a daylong affair with invited papers from Dr. Balut Mavlyudov from the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dr Tadashi Tsuboi (aka Kuramoto) of the Akiyoshi-dai Museum of Natural History in Japan and myself. Following the obligatory welcoming speeches there were our three papers plus four from various Korean authorities and a lengthy discussion session that seemed largely about me fielding questions about cave cleaning, lampenflora and monitoring of cave environments. Simultaneous translations to and from Korean, English and Japanese were a first for me – and the translators were very, very good. The audience consisted of 200-300 cave managers, local government officials, members of the Korean Cave Exploration School and post-graduate students – and probably others? Following this day there was a field trip attended by only a few of those present the day before. There were three official dinners associated with the Seminar!

Korea has thirteen show caves. Two of these are lava caves on Jeju Island and have some similarities to the cave that Professor Soo Jin Kim described so vividly at the last ACKMA conference. I visited seven caves in all in Korea including six of the remaining 11 show caves all of which are in limestone. The six show caves were *Hwanseon Cave*, *Cheongok Lime Cave*, *Ondal Cave*, *Kosu Cave*, *Tanyang Chon Cave* and *Gossi Cave*

I suspect that the show caves that I saw were amongst the best managed. Although some of the caves have been used for millennia – at least in their outer parts – all of the caves that I saw have seen their tourist development in the last 25 years. Most were developed in the last decade. The numbers of cave visitors is very high. *Hwanseon Cave*, for example, has had four million visitors over the four years of its operation. As is commonly the case numbers are now dropping and are about 600,000 a year at the moment. All the caves that I visited are self-guided/self-paced and there is minimal interpretive material available (surprisingly few postcards too?).

There is extensive use of stainless steel and cave-cleaning, and lampenflora control seems to be commonplace and well executed. In many cases there is much more development of the entire cave volume than we would expect. This is achieved by reaching upwards with ramps, stairways and “flyovers” so much so that there can be a tangle of steel and sometimes

green, plastic-coated wire mesh. The Lonely Planet Guide to Korea states about *Kosu Cave*:

Gosudongul is certainly a spectacular and extensive cave system – or rather it must have been before the catwalks and miasmic spiral steel staircases were installed up the main vertical galleries. These staircases aid access (or aid commercial exploitation?) and have been thoroughly overdone. ...Nevertheless, it's perhaps worth visiting the cave if the crowds are not too great.

The cave is long, narrow and convoluted and there is certainly too much construction for my taste. But one must remember that this cave is visited by hundreds of thousands of people who are clearly deriving very much pleasure from their visits. And there is a hell of a lot to see and enjoy in this cave! I suspect that the Lonely Planet authors became fixated on the construction works rather than the cave (as I probably did too!).

Kwannum Cave is one of a number of caves that have been systematically documented by Professor Kyung Sik Woo and colleagues from the Cave Research Institute of Korea and elsewhere. Professor Woo and members of the Korean Cave Exploration School had specially rigged *Kwannum Cave* for our visit with the installation of fixed lines, aluminium ladders and a rubber dinghy to overcome four of the eight waterfalls and a large lake so that Dr. Mavlyudov and I could tackle this cave in relative comfort – it was a trifle chilly in the 9°C water! It is a splendid and well-decorated cave and well worth a visit should you be able to wangle an invitation. It has the most effective gate that I have ever seen!

As well as caves and the seminar, Dr. Mavlyudov and I attended a presentation made by the organisers of the Samcheok World Cave Exposition to be held in July and August next year. The presentation was to the Samcheok City Council and took about three hours of video clips, PowerPoint and similar hi-tech approaches – all in Korean. The effort that is being put into this Expo is enormous – as is the number of dollars! It may not be the right time to visit Korean caves as hundreds of thousands of people are expected to visit Samcheok City and surrounds in mid-summer. But it is a cave event not to be missed – three permanent buildings are being constructed to house displays and information; several other temporary, but very substantial, structures are also being erected. A look at the web site (address above) is a must.

This is a very abbreviated account of a very interesting and satisfying trip – I only took about 350 digital photos that you may or may not ever see!

There are many people who helped make my trip to Korea a roaring success including, but by no means confined to:

- ☐ Professor Soo Jin Kim (whom we met at the April ACKMA conference)
- ☐ Ms. Sae Jung Chang (Professor Kim's PhD student who is investigating black discolourations including dust and other human-induced deposits in show caves)
- ☐ And, and by no means least, Professor Kyung Sik Woo (who will be visiting various Australian caves in December).

My sincere thanks to these three and the many other academics, central and local government employees as well as the managers of the various caves I visited.