

KAWITI GLOWWORM CAVES and other NZ Cave Delights!

- Kent Henderson

The Office at Kawiti Glowworm Cave



During my recent visit to New Zealand, after leaving Waitomo, Peter Dimond kindly drove me onto Auckland and dropped me off at the home of Dr. Ruth Lyons, now ACKMA's new Executive Officer. It was wonderful to catch up with Ruth, visit several wineries, and enjoy a most pleasant dinner out. In the midst of chatting, eating, and imbibing, Ruth took me on a trip to the sea caves on Auckland's West Coast. It is a marvellous area, with an expansive, sweeping beach and wonderful coast line. Some of the sea caves are obvious to the casual visitor, and thus well visited, but she took me to several which are largely concealed and rarely entered. Collectively, they were as good as I've seen – probably better! Thanks Ruth!

After a few further days of business in Auckland, I hired a car and headed up towards the Bay of Islands (stunning!), where I hadn't been before. En route, I diverged prior to Whangerei to visit the Waipu Caves. However, having no gear with me, and little time, I basically checked out a cave entrance or two. Ruth tells me there are some excellent caves in what is a relatively extensive karst area. No tourist cave there, but I think a commercial adventure tour operator may use them – along with cavers, of course.

I then headed north to the Kawiti Glowworm Cave, at Waiomio, near Kawakawa, just off the main north highway (commercially a very good place to be!). I was firstly struck by the surrounding karst pinnacles, which were expansive. I would describe them as tower karst! Very impressive.



Entrance signage, framed against the karst.

I rolled up to the cave office, and met George Wells, the caves manager (and duty guide). I failed to advise him of my affiliation at this stage, preferring to do the tour anonymously. So I paid my \$10, and joined a small group about to enter.

Kawiti is stream passage cave, cut through a hill, and with reasonably wide openings at both ends. As a result, the secondary deposition in the cave, while expansive, is subjected to quite high airflows, and is thus mostly "dry" and "powdery".

Nonetheless, it certainly contains some excellent features. A stream runs through the cave, and as a result it contains a good spread of glowworms.

The infrastructure in the cave is well-constructed wooden slat pathways and handrails. The cave is unlit, with lighting provided by a pressure lamp carried by the guide. It certainly has the effect of keeping the tour party together, if nothing else! I was told later that, understandably, larger parties have more than one guide, and more than one light.



A view of superb karren features on the Kawiti Karst Walk.

The tour ran about half an hour, with George conducting a clearly well rehearsed patter. This consisted of relating the Maori legend of the cave (the Kawiti family is Maori, as is George), which was interesting, and clearly of cultural significance. George also provided a good summation of the glowworm life cycle.

The balance of the tour is best described by referring to cave's brochure: "See the Galaxy of the Underworld, the World Famous Milky Way, the Jewel Camber and Jewels, Waiomio Night Sky, the Celestial City, Rock Animals, Rock Birds", etc.

Upon exiting the cave, one then traverses a karst walk back over the hill to the car park. And it is superb. The path itself is well constructed with wooden bridges and handrails as appropriate. The breath and range of the karst is stunning, particularly the karren. It might sound trite, but from all perspectives this is as good a karst walk as I have seen.

Kawiti Karst Walk infrastructure.



Upon my return to the office, I introduced myself, and ACKMA, to George, and had a chat (as you would!). Kawiti is not an ACKMA member, but George now has the latest Journal, and one would be hopeful we would soon have a new member. Evidently, the cave was evidentially electrically lit some twenty-five years ago, but they prefer it unlit as it is today. The main problem, as they see it, is intermittent flooding, and the resultant difficulty with damage to fittings.

Signage at Waipu Caves



That can be overcome with suitable infrastructure today, although at a price, of course. I did note that the cave is not gated, front nor back, but reputedly unauthorized access is rare, and is not seen as a problem. Certainly, I would encourage any ACKMA member travelling to Northern New Zealand to visit Kawiti, particularly to take in its wonderful karst walk!

Sea Cave entrance on Auckland's West Coast.



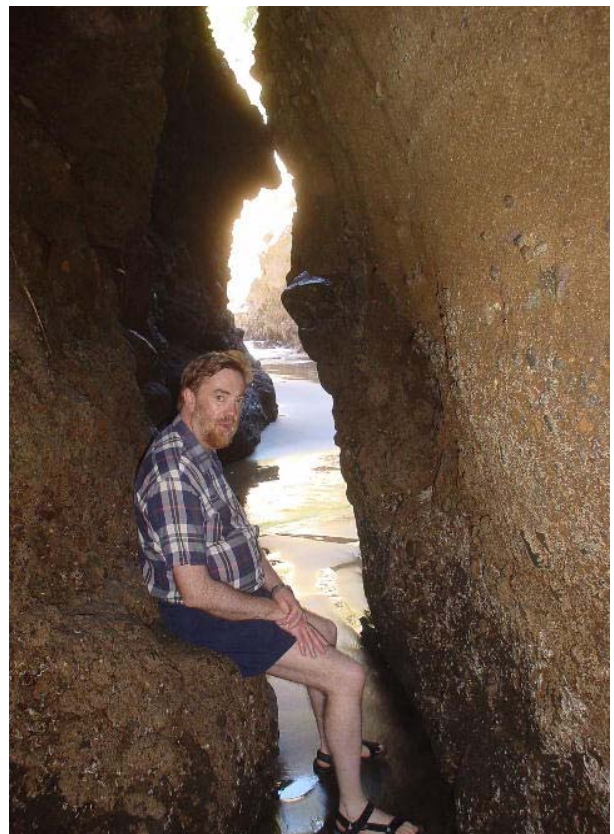
A couple of days later, in the morning before flying out, I decided to spend a few hours by driving to Nikau Cave at Waikaretu, which is on the West Coast of the North Island south of Auckland and North-west of Hamilton. After over an hour driving through what must have been four or five magnificent karst valleys on route,

I was impressed. Unfortunately, I didn't note any sign to Nikau, and my time was very limited to search around, so it will have to await a future visit. Nikau is an ACKMA member, and is located on a working farm. Tours, which must be pre-booked, are effectively adventure tours. For those internet-interested, the relevant URLs are:

www.nikaucave.co.nz

and

www.taitokerau.com/east/kawiti/kawiti.htm



Kent Henderson framed in a Sea Cave entrance - Auckland's West Coast.