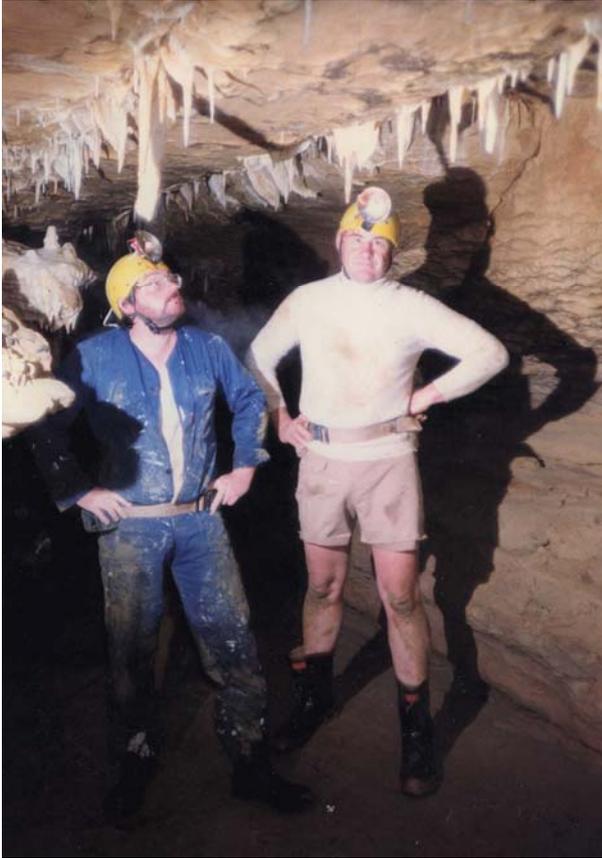


# TRIBUTES TO THE LATE PETER DIMOND

## SOMEONE IS MISSING

- John Ash (Letter to Waitomo News: 11-January 2003)

Peter Dimond (right) caving with Glen Bailey



I would like to acknowledge a hole that has appeared in the fabric of the Waitomo Community. In all small towns and villages there are invariably people who play a major role in waving the rich social tapestry of people and amenities together.

They are the 'networkers' – usually modest, generous to a fault, often outspoken, sometimes dogmatic, but always driven by a passion for the place they live and the people who surround them. Peter Dimond was such a person.

My wife and I ended up settling in Waitomo because of Peter's passion, his open friendly nature and his willingness to help us make this place our home. When we arrived to teach in Te Kuiti in the early '70s, he made sure we found suitable rural accommodation. When we began to run adventure cave tours through Gardner's Gut Cave about 1980, he was full of encouragement, ideas and support. At that early stage he could see that the fledging Waitomo Museum of Caves would have a role to play in the next phase of tourism development.

When we decided to be a part of launching Black Water Rafting as a full time adventure tourism operation, he offered us space in the Museum as a

base and the ability to run a booking service at the front counter. When other ventures started they were given the same encouragement and support.

Unfortunately, sometimes passion and generosity cloud vision and Peter could not foresee that more adventure caving businesses would spawn yet more, and this would place unrealistic pressure on the Museum's resources and his ability to please everyone. When staff and families of these companies moved to Waitomo, Peter helped where he could by selling land for them to build on and, where he couldn't, he opened his home in a manner that surely made it one of the first Bed and Breakfast places in the country. In a sense, he was even one of the forerunners of "relationship marketing".

This summer is a busy one for the businesses in Waitomo. Parking is at a premium and people are hungry for information on the area and the activities being offered. All of the operators are concentrating on making sure visitors leave the village having had one of the most friendly and memorable experiences of their lives. We are all focused and flat out, and probably haven't had time to notice a very important part of the weekly chat around a beer is missing – the person who would have all of the local gossip at his fingertips; who would entertain endless streams of visitors; who gave generously of his time, knowledge and land, and who would worry at night about fractionation and future growth, is no longer with us.

No, he's not away on holidays, as our minds keep telling us as we eye the door expectantly. He has permanently left us to busy himself with work elsewhere and, in doing so, has left us all with the challenge of becoming weavers and networkers with his passion and sense of vision in Waitomo. Peter, we all have so much to thank you for.



Peter Dimond receiving the QSM (Queens Service Medal) at Government House with sons Julian and Christen – 1993.

On 22 December, Waitomo lost a long-time resident and faithful friend. For many of us, Peter Dimond's death has left a big hole in our daily lives.

Peter's father, Garn, arrived in Waitomo from Wellington in 1910 to carve out a farm "up the Putaki". After World War I, Garn established a farm in Waitomo, married Sylvia Olssen (who lived where Linda Haggas lives now) and had three children, Peter, Margaret and Vivienne. Peter attended Waitomo Caves School and New Plymouth Boys High School before returning to help his father on the family farm. He married Sue McNaughton in 1970 and they raised Julian and Christen on the family farm.

Farming was not Peter's passion, the museum was – as a child Peter collected and displayed treasures. After honing his organisational skills on the Hamilton Tomo Group, the National Party, and the Te Kuiti Club, Peter became and remained the driving force behind the establishment and maintenance of the Waitomo Caves Museum. Peter's goal was to retire from the Museum in the next year (seeing would have been believing).

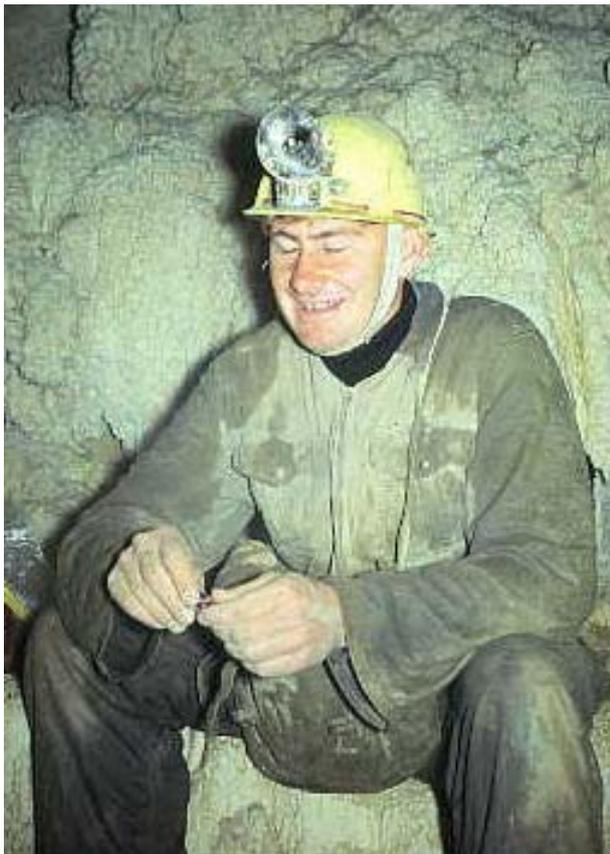
Peter's hospitality was second to none. Generations of cavers, non-cavers, friends of cavers, friends of Waitomo and others have enjoyed Peter's generous hospitality – his meals, drinks and mattresses. Peter's culinary skills and food presentation rivalled Auckland's best (although he often argued the point), his breakfasts were legendary and his drinks were the strongest around!

The Dimond house, for many, many people in Waitomo, New Zealand and beyond, has been synonymous with warmth and welcome (and great memories). Peter maintained friendships across generations and countries. His funeral was a gathering of such well-maintained friendships – all ages!

We shall miss his stutter when he had had too much to drink, his stubbornness, his size, his cellotaped glasses, and the many other thousands things that made Peter unique. Condolences to Julian, Christen, Shirley, Sue, the museum staff, Pete's many boarders and the Waitomo community on the loss of an old and dear friend.

## WAITOMO CAVES LOSES ITS DIMOND

- Maureen Wilkie (*Waitomo News* 14 January 2003)



Peter Dimond in Karamu Cave - 1966

Peter Dimond is best remembered as the driver behind the Waitomo Museum of Caves, but his hospitality and sanguine personality are also recalled with fondness. Mr. Dimond (64), the Director of the Museum, died on December 22, about a week after the debut of the Museum's audio-visual show.

Mr. Dimond was a pioneer of the bed and breakfast concept in New Zealand. He enjoyed a beer, a joke, socialising and caving. When he was about six years old, he started his own museum. He would collect anything of interest, including an emu egg and his father's war medals. Many family friends bought him collectibles from overseas.

Waitomo Caves Museum Society Chairman, Glen Bailey, portrayed Mr. Dimond as a man with many sides to his personality, and as a man of vision. "Pete was a man who had a dream. He wanted to build a museum. Not just any museum, he wanted it to be the best caves museum in the world."

Mr. Bailey said one of Mr. Diamond's most unbending rules was that the museum must stay open every day. He said Mr. Dimond was a museum enthusiast and he couldn't understand others not wanting to be so dedicated. But they did follow his dream. "I had to eat my words many times when I said it couldn't be done," said Mr. Bailey.

The Dimond residence was often full of people. "Some of the parties in that house were amazing. Pete loved to entertain, from an elegant dinner to a home barbecue. He loved to cook and try recipes. " He was a prankster – his tricks tended to revolve around electric shocks. There was a long drop on the farm, which Mr. Dimond modified slightly. Inside, on the wall, was a handle that said, "don't wind". Of course, that was just the invitation many people needed to give it a try, and they received an electric shock when they did.

He was also accident-prone – he once fell off the museum's roof, drove into the corner of his house and forgot to attach appliances properly when they were being shifted.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger described Mr. Dimond as a friend and said the museum stood as a tribute to his commitment to the Waitomo Caves community. "I knew Peter, not as a family member, but as a friend. A friend whose loyalty never faltered despite the vicissitudes of politics. He was there in the good times and in the bad – there with a word of advice or a suggestion," said Mr. Bolger. "In keeping with his character, he didn't harangue, he quietly and at times persistently suggested."

Mr. Dimond was a staunch National Party supporter and was part of the committee that nominated Mr. Bolger as King Country's representative. He held many positions in the National Party, at electoral level and with the local Waitomo and Te Kuiti branches. Mr. Bolger recalled the pride Mr. Dimond felt on the wet afternoon when the museum was opened to the public in 1981. The first museum at Waitomo was opened in the hotel in 1973.

Mr. Bolger said Mr. Dimond had the ability to meet and mix with people of importance, but never lose his innate sense of values. "Peter's quiet disposition could hide his passion on various issues. Nowhere was this more evident than shortly after I entered politics, when his beloved Waitomo Caves were threatened, or more correctly the glow-worms that made the caves special were threatened through inappropriate management. Then Peter was persistent, with others, in his advocacy of the need to make changes, and the changes were made."

Peter Leonard Dimond was born in Otorohanga on May 30, 1938. His father Garnett, mother Sylvia, and younger sisters Margaret and Vivian, lived on a farm at Waitomo.

His parents were famous for their hospitality, a trait for which Mr. Dimond also became well known. He attended primary school at Waitomo and his secondary education was at New Plymouth Boys High School. As a young boy he was not really interested in farming, but Mr. Dimond was the only son and the eldest in the family, so it was natural and expected that he would take over the family farm.

Caving introduced Mr. Dimond to people who became his lifelong friends. The Hamilton group caves hut was built on Dimond land, and was a gathering point for underground adventurers. In 1970, Mr. Dimond met Sue McNaughtan and within six weeks he asked her to marry him. They were married on Valentine's Day, February 14, 1970.

They had two sons – Julian and Christen – but separated in 1978. Mr. Dimond was sworn in as a justice of the peace more than 30 years ago and was also a marriage celebrant. He was a past president of the Te Kuiti Club and a member of the Waitomo Club. His community work was recognised in the Queens Birthday honours in 1993, when he was awarded the Queens Service Medal for community service.

## **PETER DIMOND and THE WAITOMO MUSEUM OF CAVES**

- Peter Chandler

Peter Burdette and Peter Dimond at the bottom of Harwood's Hole - 1960



I have referenced the Newspaper Archives of the Waitomo Museum, and the Museum Society's minute books, to provide some details of Peter over the years.

"25 May 1962. Caver, Peter Dimond rescues a valuable sheepdog from a hole on Mr. Bricklands Property at Piopio. 70 feet down a sheer Tomo, the farmer had entertained the idea of shooting the

poor animal, till it was thought to contact the New Zealand Speleological Society. Peter reported that such actions pay back in a small way, the hospitality offered by farmers, on whose property New Zealand Speleological Society (NZSS) members often explored on caving trips."

Peter had become an avid caver certainly from his parents accommodating Cavers in the wool shed, adjacent to the house, on the family farm one kilometre west of the Waitomo Caves.

Two 40 Pound Army huts that had been used as road workers shelter in the 1950s further along the Te Anga Road were moved onto the Dimond Farm as the Original Hamilton Tomo Group (HTG) Huts. Designed to sleep 12 people, they often accommodated 35 or so.

In 1967, by which time Peter had taken over the operating of the Family Farm, he considered it time that a quarter acre of land be donated to the Hamilton Tomo Group (HTG).

While this proposal was initially turned down by the Waitomo County Council due to its ten acre minimum subdivision, several months later the decision was reversed, in acknowledgement of the group's assistance to the area. Peter Continued as unpaid HTG Hut warden for many years, until

such time that resident cavers took over responsibilities mid week, and by 1987 they even got a bit of pocket money for their efforts.

In August 1969 Peter acted as the surface co-ordinator for five young cavers who were attempting to spend two weeks underground, noting that after six days without a clock they had become a day slow in their reckoning of time. In total they spent around 200 hours underground.

Peter, along with John Hobson and Byre Tonar, became the HTG's first Gold Life Members in when the original Huts were complimented by a \$17000 Kitchen-Dining-Lounge, which I'm sure members who have attended the two ACKMA conferences at Waitomo would be familiar with. Peter continued his support for the HTG, attending meetings and a Christmas dinner function the day before his death.

Not surprisingly, Museum archives detail interesting newspaper pieces. Peter's letter to the editor of the *King Country Chronicle* enlightened readers as to Waitomo village history. He was outspoken on matters concerning caves in 1967. He wrote to the local paper editor to set the record straight when it was wondered what effect widening of the Million Dollar Corner below the Hotel would do to the Glowworm Cave 300 yards away, viz: "I do not believe that moderate blasts would have any detrimental effect on stalactite formations at all. To begin with, the cave does not contain " delicate stalactite formations" as the Minister of Tourism maintains."

Interestingly, in 1977 Peter and *McDonalds Lime* applied to the Town and Country Planning Committee of the Waitomo District Council for limestone Quarrying on sixty acres one kilometre up from Fullerton Road. Not surprisingly, this drew many objections from local Iwi (Moari residents), from NZSS, and from the Ministry of Works, and was thus declined. *McDonalds Lime* went on to open their present site several years later, which delegates visited during the 1997 ACKMA Conference at Waitomo.

The entrepreneurial Peter Dimond at one stage had the Farm prospected for any serpentine deposits. This mineral had been found at Wairere 30 km south of Waitomo, where the metamorphic rock sits amongst the Jurassic Greywackes.

Peter's early passion for collecting has been detailed. Local Resident Jeff Lee told of a Waitomo community gathering where Jeff said a small voice in the crowded room stated "I'd like there to be a Museum in Waitomo".

Around four years later on 9 July 1973, Peter chaired a Meeting to gauge the support for a Museum as the Chairman of the Waitomo Caves Domain Advisory Board. At this meeting, Peter had got Chris Templar, a Guide, speleologist and authority on bird bones, subfossils and snails, to bring along one of his "wholly interesting displays " He also reported that the NZSS included members who are interested in the formation of a "National Museum of Speleology". At this meeting Mr. Don Pollock, the Hotel Manager, offered use of two rooms on the ground floor of the Hotel.

There were differences in opinion of what a local museum should be. Don Pascoe and Vaughn Morgan proposed and seconded that a Waitomo Caves Museum be established and temporarily housed in the Waitomo Hotel. Don Pascoe and Joe Tahi proposed and seconded that Peter Dimond be president of the new committee. Peter expressed his thanks to the meeting for the confidence shown in him. "Waitomo Caves Museum Committee" was formed three days later.

The Museum hopes to cover the following:

- Local Maori History and Culture
- Colonial History
- Natural and Speleological history of the area.

On the evening of 15 October 1973 the Waitomo Caves Museum, located in two Hotel Rooms, was opened by Mr. J. M. Sommerville, Chairman of the Waitomo County Council. Hotel Manager, Mr. Muckleston, gave the Society additional storage space in the hotel garage - this was at the time when Cave tickets were sold from the hotel. Over 20, 000 people visited in the first year.

At the Society's AGM in August 1974 Peter Dimond, in his capacity as Chairman, reaffirmed the hope that they would eventually have their own Museum, and outlined plans to meet representatives about a possible site. The present museum land was then under Education Board control. Fundraising was underway in earnest. The Museum Committee owned the Waitomo Tavern pool table, and had local farmers raise 38 weaner steers.

The preferred museum site brought some criticism from the community. These included citing probable traffic congestion (like at the Glowworm cave before their car park was built), safety concerns with the school bus shed (now gone) and a lack of privacy for the school.

At the 1975 AGM, Peter as Chairman reported visitation having topped 30,000 per annum, and thanked those helping with fundraising. At the 1976 AGM, all those present agreed unanimously as to the need for a Museum in Waitomo, and the central village as the preferred site. Support had been gained from Department of Conservation's forerunner (The Lands and Survey Department). The Tourist Hotel Corporation (THC) - then operator of the Waitomo Glowworm Cave - told the Society that no provision could be made in its proposed new facilities building at the Glowworm Cave, so they too supported a central Waitomo site and were prepared to re-allocate land holdings for the purpose.

Only half the desired paddock was earmarked for the project, and the Education Board stated it would view the matter favourably if a land exchange with the THC Waitomo Hotel could be arranged and that legal access could be provided up the private Hotel road. Additionally, the Ministry of Works planners preparing a Waitomo village development plan thought the proposed site was the most suitable. The THC Hotel manager reiterated THC cooperation for the project, but wanted to finalise plans for their facilities building before any land exchange.

At the start of October 1980, contractors had begun on New Zealand's first Caves Museum. The land remained owned by the Crown. To pay for the 260 square metre building, \$20,000 was contributed from fundraising, \$10,600 by way of a government grant, and \$70,000 from a loan – whose interest and principal would be serviced by the Tourist Hotel Corporation.

The second stage of the project was to complete the displays. This was achieved with help of staff from Auckland and Waikato Universities and Chris Templar. The Museum finally opened on 17 October 1981.

From its opening a conscious decision was made to employ paid staff rather than volunteers, and that admission for children and secondary students be free. The Museum Society was able to employ a number of staff through the Labour Department's Project Employment Program (PEP) and other schemes which attracted a number of cavers and science graduates and locals including Trevor Worthy, Cathy Giles, Robert Arrell, Malcolm Wood, Mike Hutchings, Diana Carey, Peter Chandler, Glen Bailey, Libby Hall, Glenn Stevens and Ben Stubbs. Chris Templar was even employed as a supervisor.

In 1986, the Museum society had secured a \$210,500 Community and Public sector grant from the Tourism and Publicity Department, Mike Moore being the then Minister of Tourism. The money was provided to double the exhibition area, and create workshop and storage facilities.

At its new location the Museum also provided an Information Centre, but was unable to sell cave tickets for many years, although the THC had created a combined Cave & Museum concession. By 1987, the selling of the Black Water Rafting Company's adventure cave tours had begun, which grew quickly and helped the Museums cash flow.

At the August 1989 AGM Peter Dimond retired as the Chairman of the Museum Society with the intention of becoming a fulltime paid director. Peter was presented with a silver tray to mark the occasion. He said in his Chairman's Report that the highlight of the year had been the official opening of the recent extensions by Dr. David Bellamy on 11 February 1989.

As the second half of the original School Paddock had now been used for Museum extensions, a commemorative canoe carved by Walter Anderson was unveiled the same day by the Rev. Rua Anderson to acknowledge the original ownership of this land.

The Waitomo School still has its access down to the Store, and is hidden from the main street by virtue of its terrace location. It is unclear whether the school's legal access has ever become via the Hotel Access Road.

Although the proposed sale by the Government of the Tourist Hotel Corporation was causing some uncertainty, this did mean that they discharged the Mortgage held over the museum's buildings. The Museum's Education Service, that had been

started by Mike Hutchins and Dianna Carey on PEP scheme money, eventually had out grown the old Audio-Visual Room, so surplus cash and a loan provided the finances for an upgraded entrance, relocated toilets and a purpose built education centre sited beyond the extended museum with a separate formal entrance. This facility was officially opened by the Rt. Hon. Jim Bolger, New Zealand Prime Minister, on the 8 April 1994.

In 1995 under the guidance of Martha Ash, the Museum was first able to secure an annual funding contract from the Education Department to cover a full time teacher's salary, plus expenses. In 1997 this was extended to a three-year contract that has continued till the present.

Several years ago it was agreed amongst the Museum Board that the Glowworm display material needed upgrading. A designer was engaged, in which initially a total rebuild of the display areas was planned for. This included the displays being closed for a two month period around August 2002.

Upon completion, fundraising again started for the Glowworm Display. Peter was able to secure a \$43,000 grant and the three projector digital audiovisual show was officially opened on the 15 December 2003.

The leadership and drive of Peter Dimond, over the years, was crucial to success and development of Waitomo's Museum of Caves, and the local community will be forever in his debt.



Peter Dimond in the Museum of Caves at Waitomo with a gift of fossils from Tim Wood - 1997

