

MOLE CREEK AND GUNNS PLAINS HAPPENINGS

- Cathie Plowman

Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service Karst Officer (I think –though his title seemingly changes daily!)
Ian Household (centre) with Jenny Dyring and
Steve Swabey – Conference 2003



Lighting for caves

Sensual, stunning, sustainable and spiritual are all words I've heard describing Neil Kell's lighting design. Having arranged for Neil to come to Tasmania to design new lighting for King Solomons Cave, I decided that it was time to drive a few hours south and see Neil's work in Newdegate Cave at Hastings. I hadn't needed to view it to book Neil in. I'd heard more than enough words of praise for his work and my visit to Hastings confirmed that he is indeed a lighting magician.

In July the Tasmanian Premier and Minister for Tourism, Parks, Heritage and the Arts, Jim Bacon announced that \$250,000 would be allocated towards re-lighting King Solomons Cave and Marakoopa Cave as part of a \$10 million upgrade of visitor and interpretation facilities in Tasmania's national parks.

The new Bass Strait ferries have had a huge impact on visitor numbers to Tasmania's national parks. Marakoopa Cave visitation was up 20% last summer on the previous year and King Solomons Cave visitation up 14%.

Staff changes

The last few months have seen changes in staffing at Mole Creek. David Geoghegan (that's pronounced 'gay-gan' if you're wondering) has been appointed senior ranger and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Mole Creek Karst National Park. David has been based at Liawenee on the Central Plateau of Tasmania for almost three years since migrating to Tasmania from a ranger position in the Northern Territory. The former Mole Creek and Liawenee Parks and Wildlife Service field centres have been merged to create the Great Western Tiers field centre.

Senior Ranger Dick Dwyer has taken up a new position based in Launceston and is responsible for asset management across the central north of the state.

Janelle Payne has been appointed as business manager for Marakoopa and King Solomons caves and is responsible for day-to-day management of this key tourism business. Janelle's immediate goals include reducing tour party sizes, eco-tourism accreditation, having a tour booking system so that visitors can book in advance, increasing the emphasis on staff health and safety, new cave tourism products and increased training for cave guides. Janelle's background includes a host of work in tourism guiding and guiding management. In recent months she's worked as a guide at Gunns Plains Cave.

I am now working between interpretation and tourism projects at both the caves and Cradle Mountain. At the caves my focus is on developing staff training, new tour products, the lighting projects and the proposed re-development of King Solomons Cave. A statewide cave tourism plan is also on my *middle-burner*.

Site planning and King Solomons Cave tunnel

Plans are afoot to engage a karst specialist to develop site plans for both Marakoopa and King Solomons caves and also to prepare an environmental impact assessment for the proposed tunnel to link King Solomons Cave with Queen of Sheeba Cave.

This link would allow an option for self-timed cave tours with visitors making their way through the cave at their own pace. The cave would still have staff in attendance to keep an eye on things and answer questions.

Whether this work is done by creating and filling a position or by contract is still being determined. The ACKMA internet pages will be kept up-to-date with developments.



Cathie Plowman (right) with Lana Little –
Conference 2003

Tasmanians all – L. to R.: Dr. Kevin Kiernan, Chester Shaw, and Kay Shaw – Conference 2003



Gunns Plains Cave

This beauty of a cave about 20 minutes south of Ulverstone has been operated by the Parks and Wildlife since the concessionaire and veteran cave guide, Curly Willcox, hung up his torch and migrated to Victoria for wedding bells last February.

The Parks and Wildlife Service is about to announce an *expressions of interest* process to determine private interest in the operation of the cave. It's a lovely part of the world and the cave is a gem.

So if you know of a cave/tourism/business focussed person with lots of energy and ideas who might be looking for a sea-change get them to call John Holmes at the Parks and Wildlife Service on (03) 6233 3636.

Chillagoe and Undara

Writing this article has taken me back to the terrific conference in Queensland earlier this year. Thanks again to Lana, Val and David for their fantastic organisation. Is the heart-start equipment in place in Chillagoe yet Lana?



Kent Henderson at Cradle Mountain, Tasmania, in the Precambrian (give or take a few million years...)

2003 GUIDES WORKSHOP and ACKMA AGM

The program and costs are still being developed. I'm working with *Tourism Tasmania* to organise conference rates for travel to Tasmania and getting prices from accommodation venues. More details will be available as they are finalised. I plan to work with Kent and Rauleigh and add details to the ACKMA page as they are developed. Watch the page as from mid-October for developments. Full details will also be in the December ACKMA Journal.

Details to date are:

VENUE: Mole Creek Hotel

DATES: Sunday 23 May: Pre-workshop caving. Trips being organised with the Northern Caverneers caving club.

MONDAY 24–WEDNESDAY 26 MAY: Guides workshop: Presentations being developed. If you'd like to make a presentation please contact me.

THURSDAY 27 & FRIDAY 28 MAY: Interpretation skills workshop. *Developing and taking great guided tours.* Professor Sam Ham and Professor Betty Weiler, from Monash University, will lead this exciting two-day workshop. Places will be limited to 25 people and there will be a fee to cover the professional costs of the leaders.

SATURDAY 29 & SUNDAY 30 MAY:

- **ACKMA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**
- Post-workshop trips to Cradle Mountain and Gunns Plains

MONDAY 31 MAY & TUESDAY 1 JUNE: Post AGM trip to Hastings Cave.

More details for these exciting events will be on the ACKMA web page as from mid-October. If you want to contribute please contact me at: cathie.plowman@parks.tas.gov.au - or on 0417 053 773.