

MORE 15th CONFERENCE COMMENTS

Greg Martin (left) chats with Barry Richard
– Conference 2003



Greg Martin wrote:

The Chillagoe and Undara experience was indeed a memorable one and the general quality of papers has, I think, lifted our standard to a new level. The conference provided a great opportunity to explore the Dry Tropics area in outback Australia and to experience something of an outback village environment at Chillagoe. Meeting the community and being able to assist them with a worthwhile fundraising opportunity, while at the same time dedicating a memorial to Peter Dimond, our past President, proved to be a great outcome for both the community and ACKMA.

The 2003 conference provided an excellent variety for delegates with the opportunity to understand something of the local economy and conditions, as well as an exciting contrast between the ancient geology and tower karst of Chillagoe and the impressive volcanic wonders of Undara. Once again, this conference has set a new standard for ACKMA and presents some exciting possibilities for the next conference on the West Coast of the South Island, New Zealand.

Can I commend the organising committee for their work in putting together a wonderful and memorable experience for all delegates in tropical North Queensland.

Jim Baitchel wrote:

Kent, I am writing you to thank you for the opportunity to attend and present at the 15th ACKMA Conference. I greatly appreciated the hospitality and professionalism shared by yourself and the other conference delegates. I was glad to share with the delegates a limited view of the level of karst development here in Southeastern Alaska and our management strategy and issues. Though not scheduled I was also glad to share our experiences with Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) technology here on the Tongass.

Kevin Kiernan (left) and Jim Baitchel
– Conference 2003



As is the case with such conferences, the greatest benefit outside the presentations were the numerous and varied discussions with a number of the delegates on issues of karst management. These discussions were most valuable. With delegates attending from Tasmania, New Zealand, Canada, and, myself from Southeastern Alaska, most of the temperate rainforest karst lands of the world were represented. Though we each have our specific management concerns, our similarities greatly outweigh our differences. Though I had communicated with these and other individuals for many years this was the first time we could all sit down in one place and discuss karst management goals and strategies.

It is quite possible that karst resource concerns and issues of Southeastern Alaska are more similar to those of Tasmania and New Zealand than other karst areas within the continental United States. Given this similarity and the fact that our Silurian carbonates formed south of the equator before plate tectonics delivered them to their present position, maybe you and ACKMA will consider including us in your membership and future conferences.

Jay Anderson wrote:

I was really looking forward to the ACKMA conference in Queensland. It would be an opportunity to catch up with friends I met whilst doing the CSU Karst Management Course, meet new people, learn some more and visit caves and Karst areas that were new to me. I had been to two ASF conferences (1993 – Tasmania and 2003 – W A) so I was familiar with the context of paper presentations and what to expect in that sense from a 'conference'.

My experience could only be described as 'fantastic', 'awesome' and 'great'. It was a great conference and the organisers need to be congratulated. Chillagoe was a pleasant town, nestled in with the karst and it really reminded me of the Kimberley.

Jay Anderson (left), with Peter and Ann Wood
- Conference 2003



There were so many things to see and do, our days were action packed. The presentations were interesting and excellent and the opportunity to meet other speleologists and cave managers was invaluable. It was great to be a part of such a memorable event and to see the local community working together. Their hospitality, friendship and openness was great to see.

What was a highlight for me was the 'field trips'. After reading information on the area's geology, it was excellent to consolidate that with practical trips. Talking to the rangers as we visited a cave, or walking around the towers – then the bus trips – swapping seats to talk to many different people. The trip down to Undara was also interesting, a whole different part of the country. The atmosphere was fantastic - the lava tubes, the breakfast in the bush, more interesting presentations and the railway carriages. And who could forget the wonderful swims in the pool – certainly not the New Zealanders, Tasmanians and THIS west Australian!!!

It was an excellent conference, one I'll never forget – I even survived my first 'paper presentation'. I look forward to attending the next ACKMA conference and to catching up with all the people I met and the friends I made. I was even able to take lots of photos so I have some reminders of what a fantastic and memorable time I had in May 2003. See you all in New Zealand!

Brett Dalzell wrote:

I had the distinct misfortune of bumping into the right honourable Kent Henderson in the Cairns airport lounge on my departure from the 15th ACKMA conference.

"So what did you think of the conference" he said.

"Unreal, I need to get home for a well earned rest though!" I replied.

"You wouldn't mind putting a few words together for the ACKMA Journal?" he so kindly asked.

How could I refuse!! Hence it is under sufferance that I now find myself undertaking this. So from what angle am I to approach this? I am sure there will be plenty written on the conference and of the proceedings, so I thought I would tackle this from the social angle! This was my third ACKMA conference on the trot (no way my last) but it would have to be the best so far.

So where do you start, the people, the venues, the papers, the partying, the working dogs or the Sigma Crew!** So many laughs and such a good time were had, even before I had got to Cairns.

Bourney (that's Steve Bourne – Ed.) and myself had already completed a trial run the week prior at Wombeyan, whilst attending the compulsory residential school for the karst management course (big commitment, but worth doing). Under the watchful eye of learned lecturers Grimes and Lipscombe, a small but dedicated team of students killed the pinball machine whilst spreading goodwill between the two pubs of Taralga. Country pubs with cold beer that provide a big feed are the go. The mixed grill we highly recommend, although one of our overseas brothers shed a tear or two when the lamb chops came out. A big thankyou to gentleman Mike Chalker and his crew for their Wombeyan hospitality, and an opportunity to see some good country again, although it was somewhat hard to undertake hydrological studies with no rainfall!

I arrived in Cairns and got to share the room with Dr Grant Gartrell and Steve Bourne. What an experience that was – Grant with his late night, SBS television sessions and Bourney getting all amorous after a beer or two. I saw more rain in Cairns in two days than in two years in Ceduna, South Australia, where I come from (still, no defence for flooding the bathroom boys!). I suppose that would explain why they cancelled our return accommodation! We played tourist and did the sky rail to Kuranda, where Grant had a brief encounter in the toilets with Bruce, enough said on that one I think!

It was then onto the bus and Chillagoe/Undara, here we come! Catching up with people, friends you hadn't seen for years and the foundation for new ones were well underway. There was a quiet undertone occurring with rumours that the specialist Sigma team was quietly reforming and was on a recruitment drive.

The warmth and kindness shown by the friendly people of Chillagoe was exceptional – true country hospitality, nothing to much trouble and probably too many beers were consumed in all of the venues. The games of pool in the top pub soon drew the crowds and had the challengers lining up around the room. The kiwi connection and a number of other motley combinations tried hard but the team to beat had to be that of my good little mate Robert Gani from Mulu, and myself.

Brett Dalzell and Claire Baker 'recovering' in the back of the bus – Conference 2003



The level of skill, and shot selection, being played was nearly as bad as the selection of tunes that were blaring out of the juke box in the corner – now really, who in their right mind would purposely select a Johnny Cash number?

The caves of Chillagoe just blew me away, the tourist caves were nice, but the stuff the Sigma Crew saw with Lana Little was top shelf and as you would expect, Jonathon Woods was in fine form! This is definitely one place I will come back to.

Then it was back onto the bus and off on an epic journey to Undara, thankfully new Sigma recruit, Timbo (Tim Moulds – Ed.), had planned well, which somewhat eased the burden, with his supply of liquid refreshments.

The Undara resort and its accommodation are certainly unique. It was rather ironic though that the party crew were housed together up the top end, far from the bar and with no esky. Always up to the challenge, members Bourney and Cammo (Cameron James – Ed.) improvised and ensured that a

continuous supply of cold refreshments were available for all.

The meals and the bar service were first class, although a juke box in the saloon carriage would not go astray, and this soon became evident when the glowworm attempted to tickle the ivories and a sing along ensued.

Then it was onto the caves or rather the tubes. My first impressions? It was certainly interesting and rather novel considering that a small forest must have been sacrificed for the amount of board walk and infrastructure installed.

All very nice, but by the 3rd or 4th tube most of us were getting a little lava(d) out. An afternoon walk to check out the terrain may have been better received.

Those who took the opportunity for a day at the dogs were not disappointed with Tom and his team of working dogs, a humble man with a heart of gold. An afternoon well spent.

I am not going to go on too much about the dinner, except to say it was a hoot, although Andy must take some responsibility for starting us off on the shooters. It was good to see Sigma cleaned up with the Conference Awards, all of which we will cherish and wear with pride! Remember you must always re-hydrate before you de-hydrate!

To our Kiwi brothers and sisters and Sigma people, we looking forward to the next Conference, but be warned – you had better throw a few extra slabs of beer on ice. We will be there! On behalf of all the Sigma Team, I say, "ACKMA give us a wave!!!"

****EDITOR'S NOTE:** For the 'uninitiated', the Sigma Crew originated at the 14th ACKMA Conference at Wombeyan Caves in 2001, when a group went caving in Sigma Cave thereat. The group (which has a fluid membership – quite literally!) is renowned for its lack of sleep, laughter, and its collective ability to imbi-de.



The President (centre) revels with her minions – Conference Dinner 2003



The 'Sigma Crew' (and a few sundry odd bods) practise imbibing – Conference Dinner 2003

