

“Best of the West”



**What are those trees? Which caves are these?
Which Pancake rocks? Will I get lost?
No, just head for the Coast
And make the most!!**

- Mary Trayes

*Stay tuned to find out what you'll miss if you don't come to the
2005 ACKMA Conference on the New Zealand's West Coast*

Caving on the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand is more often adventurous than not, even in some of the easier caves and especially for the uninitiated.

Our coastline is 600 kilometres long and there are only 30,000 people. That leaves a lot of bush and hidden away behind it there are still many caves yet to be found. None of the many karst areas have been fully explored for caves or biodiversity. *Megomania* up off the Heaphy Track, *Abyssinia* at Bullock Creek and *Te Ana Puta* at Point Elizabeth were all only properly explored in the 1990s.

Between the mild climate and the rainfall, the bush and the not knowing what's out there still, there are plenty of adventures yet to be had for the hardy. Some of the caves have become a bit more tamed with tracks, and even trains to them. Some

have better access with bridges and improved roads but all the caves we will go to on the main conference program can be off limits if we get a really good downpour. Out on the coast we get around 2500mm a year but back in the hills that can go up to 4000 or even 5000mm. Luckily April is the second driest month, on average. But it might be wise to bring a broly with your caving gear.

There will also be opportunities on the main conference program to see some of our wonderful coastal scenery at close hand. On Day 4 there will be a trip out to Cape Foulwind to see the Cement Works, the limestone quarry and the local seal colony while on the last day there will be a walk along the Point Elizabeth Track and for the adventurous a chance to see *Te Ana Puta's* second sea cave entrance.



Point Elizabeth and the Twelve Apostle Range near Greymouth. Heavy bush and supplejack vines cover the Cobden Limestone's many tomos. Photo: Stewart Nimmo.



The Cape Foulwind Lighthouse near Westport. Holcim's Cement Works and the limestone quarry are out of the picture to the left (east). Photo: Mary Trayes.

The pre-conference tour will take in some major tourism features in the central South Island including whale watching at Kaikoura and bungy-jumping, jetboating and the hot pools at Hanmer Springs. The Kaikoura stay will also take in Maori Leap Cave.

Maori Leap Cave & Caves Restaurant

Marg and Scott Robertson run their small business from the caves restaurant right on the highway just south of the Kaikoura township (east coast of the South Island). These comments from <www.thenewzealandsite.com> give an very apt description of this lovely little cave.

“The Maori Leap Cave runs through 60 million year old Kaikoura Limestone that's just dripping with stalactites. It's set into 30 metre cliffs three kilometres south of Kaikoura, close to a large roadside diner.

“Maori appear to have been unaware of the existence of the cave, and the ‘Maori Leap’ name relates to the actions of a warrior in an inter-tribal battle. He was faced with the choice of being captured and becoming a slave or jumping for freedom. He leapt off the cliffs and supposedly survived, although the story is unclear about what happened to him in the end.

“The cave was discovered (in 1958) when a quarry was being developed in the area and locals found a hole that lead into the roof of a large cavern. As this didn't offer very convenient access, an entrance through the base of the cliff was subsequently cut and the hundred metres of the

cave lit and fully explored. Tours of the cave are run out of the roadside diner close by and are delightfully low key compared to the packaged patter at more touristy places.

“The cliffs under which it runs are made of limestone that was formed around 60 million years ago from the calcium-rich shells of tiny plankton-like creatures that fell in untold billions to the sea floor when they died.

“All of this was raised above the sea within the last couple of hundred thousand years by the process of uplift and mountain building that has also created the Kaikoura ranges which reach two and a half kilometres into the sky. Unlike many limestone caves, this one was cut by the sea before subsequent uplift raised the cliffs beyond the wave's reach. Underground seepage has created the intricate formations of stalactites, stalagmites and flowstone in the cave.

“Tours take about 40 minutes and run several times a day (hardhats supplied). It's a dark, quiet and refreshing break from the sea-based activities that most people visit Kaikoura for.”



The Entrance – Maori Leap Cave (from website)



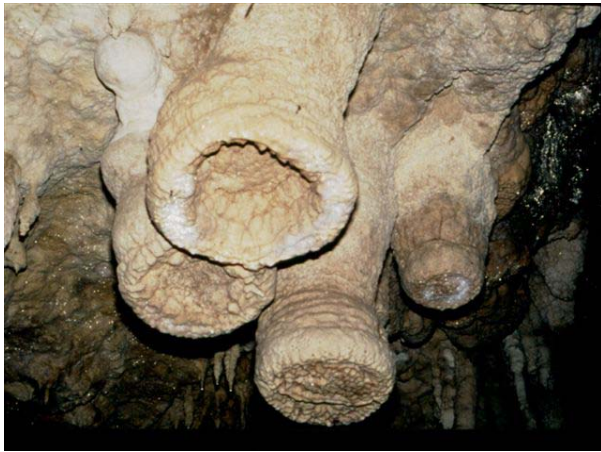
Cave's End – Maori Leap Cave (from website)

During the main conference program there will be opportunities to visit the following commercial adventure caving activities. For those who wish to see more of the West Coast's best stay on at Punakaiki for post conference caving trips to any one of Cairns, Cataract Pot, Abyssinia, Babylon or Name Later Caves. There will also be a scientific trip to the Heaphy to Megamania Cave (places strictly limited to six people for this trip).

Honeycomb Hill.....with 'Adventures New Zealand'

'Adventures New Zealand' is a fairly low key operation operating from Karamea, the small town at the end of the road at the northern end of the West Coast. They take guided tours round the tourist section of the Honeycomb Hill Caves complex. Complex it is with the main cave having 25 odd known entrances and doubtless more if one looks hard enough.

Honeycomb Hill is a major New Zealand archaeological and heritage area so the numbers allowed in the tourist section of the cave are kept low while permits to visit the 'inner sanctum' through the locked gate are issued under strict conditions by the Department of Conservation to both recreational cavers and those interested in cave fauna or palaeontology alike. The cave has developed relatively rapidly in Tertiary limestone in this high rainfall environment, producing some unusual speleothems (see the 'elephant trunks' picture).



'Elephant's Feet' – Honeycomb Hill Cave.
Photo: Courtesy of NZ Dept. of Conservation.

The area is managed by the Department of Conservation and in order to cater to non-guided tourists they maintain a good network of tracks from the car-park at the road-end (some 25 kms from Karamea) to a selection of caves and karst typical of the area (e.g. the Oparara Arch). The main cave site is thus basically off limits unless one is with Adventures NZ or on organized trip with a permit.

The area is one of the main habitats too of New Zealand's largest spider, the "*Spelungla*" and these can be found in a number of caves in the overall area including the non-guided tourist area. Land snails, *Powelliphanta* sp. are also found throughout the area although they are not always obvious to day trippers. A wet evening is a better time to spot these lovely big snails with their lovely whorled shells. Other features of the area are the luxurious rain-forest and the Oparara River which winds its way through the whole area. Cameras are a must here if you come to the conference.



Cave view – Honeycomb Hill Cave
Photo: Courtesy of NZ Dept. of Conservation.

The Metro Cave & other Trips.....with NorWest Adventures Ltd

Geoff Schurr who is on our 2005 conference committee is a principal with this company, which are based south of Westport at Charleston. Their staff and vehicles will be available to help out on the day the main conference visit the Nile Valley and Metro Cave.

NorWest have expanded in recent years and cater to many NZ and overseas visitors. All gear and transport supplied. Bookings essential and prices available at <norwest@xtra.co.nz> Currently NorWest's program invites you to partake of any one, or more, of –

Underworld Rafting - A Cave Rafting Adventure in the Paparoa National Park. Take the rainforest train through primeval rain forest, explore a calcitic cave paradise of stalactites and stalagmites, float through' incredible Glow-worm lit grottoes and have fun bouncing down the Nile River rapids. Suitable for people with water confidence 10 and over- Trips depart daily from the Charleston Cavern @ 9.00am & 2.30pm. Allow four hours.

Adventure Caving: Full on expedition style caving. Explore an amazing cave with abseils ladder climbs, squeezes, & cascading waterways. Suited to fit people only 16 and over- Trips depart daily from the Charleston Cavern @ 9.00am Allow five hours.

Charleston Gloworm Cave Tour: Take the rainforest train through' primeval rain forest, explore the amazing Nile River Caves, view an ancient "wonderland" of stalactites and stalagmites & "galaxies" of Glow-worms. Suited to everyone who can walk unassisted on an uneven surfaces. Trips depart daily from the Charleston Cavern @ 9.00am & 8.00pm. Allow three hours.

The Charleston Nile River Rainforest Train: A short interpretative train ride in open carriages through primeval rain forest in to the magnificent Nile River Canyon. Pass through the film sites for the "The Lost World" film production. Suited to everyone, old or young, fit or invalid- Trips depart daily. Last booking time at the Charleston Cavern @ 9.15 & 11.30am & 1.45 (2.45 & 5.30pm Summer Only)



The Exit of Ananui (Metro Cave).
Photo courtesy of NorWest Adventures Ltd.

Xanadu Cave -with Green Kiwi

“Green Kiwi” is a part-time commercial operation based at Punakaiki. Part-time mainly because their main operational area is based around the caves and karst at Bullock Creek and this is an area prone to flooding.

In dry weather the creek submerges above the caves to leave the creek downstream dry but after moderate rain it overflows the sinks and begins to flow on down the creek, flooding into Xanadu and other nearby caves. After really heavy rain the swamp fills as well, flooding across the road and preventing access up valley to the caves.

However tours do go and the company has a number of activities on its’ books including evening tours to listen for kiwis, guided karst walks in the Bullock Creek area and a caving trip into Xanadu Cave.

The main entrance into Xanadu is a bit of squeeze and for while nothing changes as one crawls and sidles their way into the maze of tunnels which makes up the top level of the cave.

For most beginners a tour round the top level with Les Wright is enough as he shows them cave features, takes them round and round and round again until they realize they are doing just that, points out glowworms and invites them to turn out their lights while gathered in the in the ‘lunchroom’ for that group-in-the-dark feeling. For lucky visitors he even sings in small tight passage which gets the air waves really resonating.

More able parties may get a trip down to the next level via one of two routes both requiring climbing down and teamwork to get through.

Located here are the well known “wine racks” where a row of holes like pipes, just large enough for one or maybe two are strategically placed for excellent “we wuz hair” pics.

Green Kiwi operator Les Wright and the company vehicle will be available to help out with transport and interpretation on the Bullock Creek Day of the main conference program.

***Fun down under for
ages five and up ...***
***CAVING in
XANADU
Punakaiki***

Mazes * Glow worms * Formations
No experience or specialist gear required
Ideal for groups and families

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Two visitor’s in ‘The Wine Rack’. Photo courtesy of Green Kiwi.

The Dragons Cave (Cavern Cave)....with Wild West

Paul Schramm runs the “Wild West” adventure company from Greymouth and can be contacted at <paul@newzealandholiday.co.nz>. Wild West is a fulltime commercial operation and includes a caving tour amongst other activities. The other activities include a white water tunnel trip aptly named “Chasms Underworld.”

Clients get to the start of this via either a walking track or a 40 metre abseil. The underground section utilizes an old goldmining tunnel and dam, which can be filled and then ‘let go’ to flush people through on tubes at speed. For those less adventurously inclined, there is the option too of a more leisurely raft trip. Wild West also take people white water rafting, kayaking and run outdoor adventure camps for schools and youth groups.

The cave tour. ‘Dragons Cave Rafting’, uses the Dragons Cave (Cavern Cave) at Dunollie, seven kilometres north of Greymouth. Here Cavern Cave disappears into a large robust cave, dropping and dropping down a number of small waterfalls and

through pools to a sump area. This is a wet but fun cave with a small decorated area through a side passage near the top entrance and plenty of glow-worms here and there.

An extra for many who take this tour dressed in the wetsuits supplied by the company, is a slippery slide area down a section of the creek into a pool, foam mats for sliding on supplied.

Unusually for a caving operation this one is sited on State Coal Reserve rather than on Department of Conservation land and a new mine is located only a kilometre away. Future tunnelling in this mine is planned to go under Cavern Creek at some stage and other mines could well open up even nearer some day. An unusual situation for a caving operation to be in, to say the least.

Wild West guides and vehicles will be available to ferry conference members and/or take you caving or tunnel rafting on the last afternoon of the main conference program.



A group in Dragon’s Cave, Greymouth. Photo courtesy of Wild West Adventures.

On the post conference tour there will be the opportunity to visit two commercial operations plus some other small caves under QEII Covenant on a private property.

Ice Caving – Fox Glacier....with Alpine Guides Westland

Alpine Guides Westland is a major ice guiding business based at Fox Glacier (south of Greymouth). Mike Browne, company manager says his guides will do their best to find the post-conference tour folk some ice caves but as the caves come and go with the glacier's movements we will just have to take it as it comes.

For some good views of what's on offer at the glacier – we will be there for a morning - have a look at the accompanying pictures or <www.foxguides.co.nz> or better still come on the post conference tour.

We will have the choice of two half day trips on the day, either the guided glacier walk or the heli-hike. Both are quite weather dependant but April is a fairly settled time of year so cross your fingers. Heli hikers are more likely to see ice-caves but if you've never been on the ice before, the guided walk is the way to go. This won't be a free trip but

we if we have enough in either group we will get a group rate and/or our own trips. From their brochure:

Half-day Fox Glacier Walk

Our most popular trip

A close-up experience of the spectacular features on the surface of this huge river of ice

Some agility is required: uphill climbing involved

Departs daily 9.15am and 1.45 pm

Duration 3.5 – 4 hours

Price: \$54 per person

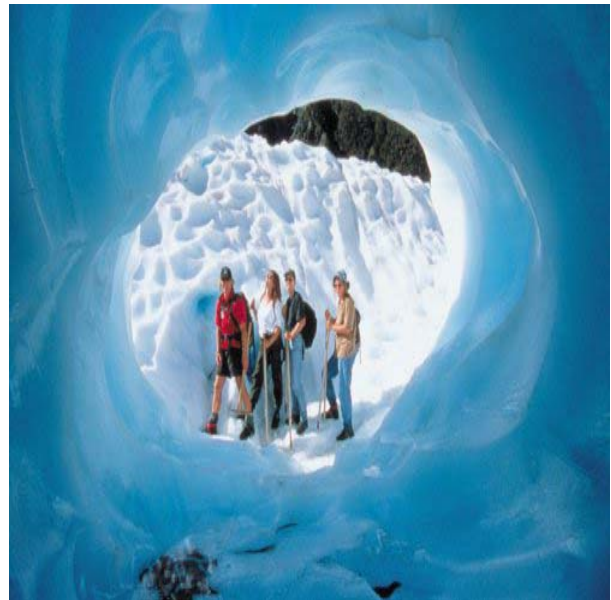
The Fox Glacier Heli-hike

See caves and formations on a remote part of the glacier

Though not strenuous some agility is required

Departs daily at 9am or noon Sept 1st – April 30th.

Price: \$245 per person



Tourists at ice caves on Fox Glacier. Photos courtesy of Alpine Guides Westland.



Te Anau Glowworm Caves - Aurora Cave.....with Real Journeys

A view inside Te Anau Caves.
Photo courtesy of Real Journeys.



ACKMA member Neil Collinson is Manager of “Real Journeys” (formerly Fiordland Travel) based out of Te Anau, Southland. See their website at <www.fiordlandtravel.co.nz>. The company will be the major sponsor of the post-conference tour and offers all those coming some good options over the two days we will spend at Te Anau.

The main feature will be the Te Anau Glowworm Cave trip which utilizes the bottom end of Aurora Cave where it drops into Lake Te Anau. Tours began here about 1950 after local tour guide Lawson Burrows had searched for four years for the cave which gave rise to the name of the area. Te ana au, now shortened to Te Anau, means “cave of the swirling water.”

Many locals thought there was no such cave but Burrows persisted and proved them wrong. Today trips to the Glowworm Cave are a regular feature on the Real Journeys program and to quote their website:

“Your Te Anau Glowworm Cave adventure begins with a scenic cruise across Lake Te Anau to the western side of the lake. Upon arrive there is time to view informative displays at Cavern House before our friendly guides invite you to accompany them underground in small groups.

“As you explore by path and small boat, your senses will be overwhelmed. Observe how the rushing water sculpts the rock formations, before gliding through silent darkness to the glowworm grotto. The delicate incandescence of thousands of tiny glowworms is a magical sight”.

It is also possible for caving groups and scientists to get a permit from the Department of Conservation to visit the other parts of Aurora Cave where there are considerable passages and streamway features.

If there is sufficient interest a permit will be obtained for the post conference tour but you will need to be reasonably fit and have your own caving gear.

On the second day delegates will have a choice of trips including visiting St Peters Cave, Clifden Caves, Doubtful Sound or Milford Sound.



Terminal Cave – Fox Glacier. Photo courtesy of Alpine Guides Westland.