

THE ACKMA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WEEKEND 2004

- Kent Henderson

Henry Shannon interprets his survey of King Solomon Cave – ACKMA AGM Weekend



Friday 28 May

The 2004 ACKMA Annual General Meeting weekend was, as expected, a wonderful event! I flew into Launceston from Melbourne, with our Executive Officer, Dr. Ruth Lyons, in tow, grabbed my hire car, and made a beeline for Mole Creek, and specifically for the Mole Creek Hotel – where we were staying and where our meetings were to be held. We arrived mid morning, and immediately barged into an excellent interpretation session which was being run by Dr. Rosemary Black and (soon to be Dr.) Penny Davidson, of Charles Sturt University, as part of the last day of the Cave Guides Workshop that had been running all week. It was a truly excellent session, and very indicative of the whole week I'm told.

After lunch, and copious 'hellos' to the many old friends who had already arrived, we then joined afternoon (and final) session of the Workshop, and listened to Sarah Li of the University of Tasmania present *Cave Interpretation in China* – and might I must say it was one of the best papers of any nature I've had the pleasure off experiencing (and that is a very great many). I will say no more here, but I will endeavour to 'induce' Sarah to allow me to publish a version in the next Journal.



The Dismal Swamp Visitors Centre under construction – ACKMA AGM Weekend

We then had Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith present an *Overview of Karst in Vietnam*, which was superb (of course). Nic Haygarth was up next. Nic is a local historian who is writing a history on Tasmanian Tourist Caves with Arthur Clarke – due out later this year. A full report on the week-long Guides Workshop will appear in the next (September) Journal.

As I knew we would hear Nic speak again the next evening, Ruth and I snuck off – as Ruth wanted to visit Cradle Mountain, and I had been induced by Cathie Plowman – the Workshop and AGM Weekend Organiser (she's very persuasive!) – to pick up Stephanie Mahon and Dale Calnin (from Buchan Caves) at Devonport at 5.30pm. We drove through sleet, then sunshine, to the 'snow on the ground' on Cradle Mountain (Ruth was happy – sigh...), before collecting the Buchaneers and fleeing back to Mole Creek – arriving nicely in time for dinner. The evening saw a pleasant meal and much banter before we retired to bed prior to a big weekend to come.

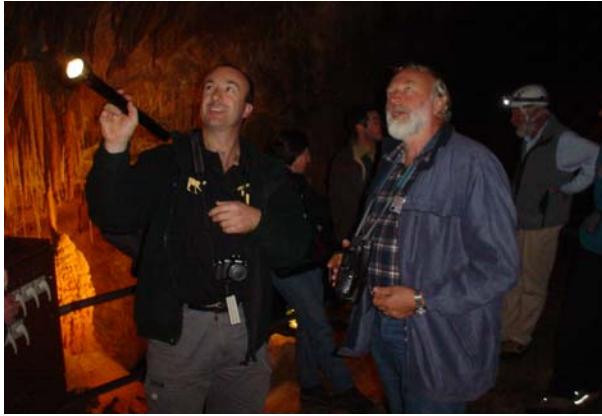


Nic Haygarth and Arthur Clarke just prior to their after-dinner presentation – ACKMA AGM Weekend

Saturday 29 May

While others slept in (necessary for many...), I dutifully stirred myself, and with the rest of the ACKMA Committee attended our scheduled 9am Committee Meeting. Happily, the entire Committee was present (tremendous, when you consider how far flung most live), except of Conference Convenor from New Zealand, Phil Wood – but Mary Trayes of the Conference Organising Committee came all the way from the South Island to deputize for him, which was most appreciated by all. Nothing overly controversial was on the agenda and the meeting went smoothly finishing at 10.45 am – 15 minutes early (well done Robyn McBeath – the mark of a good President!). At 11am the clan gathered in the Mole Creek Hotel formal dining room for the 2004 ACKMA Annual General Meeting – which went swimmingly. The minutes are inserted in this Journal, and members can read what happened for themselves, but I will highlight a few points.

Steve Bourne and Grant Gartrell in Gunns
Plains Cave – ACKMA AGM Weekend



ACKMA membership fees rose from \$45 to \$55 per annum, a modest increase only. One must bear in mind our fees have been unchanged for quite some years, and this small rise was inevitable. Members invoices for 2004-05 are likewise inserted in this Journal (please be kind to our Treasurer, Dr. Grant Gartrell, and pay promptly), and it will be noted that credit card facilities are now available for all. Ian Houshold joins the Committee at Karst Science Officer – the only change from last year.

Yet again (sigh...) nominations for the Committee did not exceed the vacancies. Mary Traves brought us up to date with arrangements with next year's ACKMA Conference of the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island. It WILL be stunning! Two new Fellows of ACKMA were elected at the meeting – Lana Little and Dr. Grant Gartrell – both extremely worthy additions to that small and illustrious group (see a separate article herein).

After the formal meeting concluded, we were favoured by an address from David Wools-Cobb of *Northern Caverneers* – discussing the involvement of a local community group (*Cave Care*) in cave management. It was an interesting presentation – many thanks David!

Finally, Stephanie Mahon (nee Finn), the manager of Buchan Caves, led us in a game of 'Cave Bingo' (it is virtually impossible to describe, so I will not try...!) – a fun way of expounding the delights of Buchan, which will be the scene of the 2007 ACKMA Conference.



David Bulter and Cathie Plowman
– ACKMA AGM Weekend

After lunch, it was off to the caves (of course!). Many members (about 35 attended the Annual Meeting), bussed off to visit the two local show caves – King Solomon and Marakooopa – while some went caving in Marakooopa 2 Cave as well. Great stuff! During the sojourn, we were fortunate to view Henry Shannon's incredibly detailed (re)survey of King Solomon Cave (with Henry present to explain it!), and in the evening many also viewed his Marakooopa survey.

The King Solomon's survey was commissioned as a precursor to the possibility of an exit being engineered from the cave to make it a through trip. Whether this eventually occurs is as yet undetermined and, clearly, there are a great many issues to be considered – which members informally discussed during their tour.

An excellent dinner was held at the Mole Creek Guest House that evening, with the main after dinner speakers being Nic Haygarth and Arthur Clarke on their upcoming book on Tasmanian Show Cave history. Their talk was very well received indeed. Andy Spate, in full flight (!), was induced to relate "The Story of Frozen Chook" (ably introduced by Dale Calnin) – a memorable tale from the 1991 ACKMA Conference at Margaret River in Western Australia.

After dinner, it was back to the Mole Creek Hotel for a very late night in the bar and at the pool table for many – with the festivities led by Steve Bourne and Ian Houshold (obvious to many the next morning when any sound above a whisper in their presence caused them tremendous anxiety...)



Stephanie Mahon (left) and Dr. Ruth Lyons,
with Kent Henderson – ACKMA AGM Weekend

Sunday 30 May

Today saw a planned trip to Gunns Plains show cave, which has recently seen new concessionaires appointed – in the persons of Geoff and Trish Deer (although their tenure has not yet been finalised). It was great to meet them and welcome them to the ACKMA Annual General Meeting. We bussed off about 9am, and had an interesting trip through a great cave. Thereafter the group headed to a Nature Park and Leven Canyon, prior to returning to Mole Creek – but Ruth Lyons, Arthur Clarke, Sarah Joyce (a recently graduated hydrologist from Hobart) and myself joined Ian Houshold on a trip to Dismal Swamp – over near Tasmania's west Coast.

Members in Gunns Plains Cave
– ACKMA AGM Weekend



Dismal has recently seen *Forestry Tasmania* develop a 'tourist attraction' on the swamp's edge, to feature a visitor centre, a 'giant slide' down to the swamp floor, and a maze at the base. Many have already dubbed it 'Dismal land'. The 'development' was supposed to be finished by now, but is so far only partly constructed. Readers will recall Deborah Hunter gave her opinion of the matter in the last Journal (No. 54, p 22).

Dismal Swamp is Tasmania's (and probably Australia's) largest polje, and it is also the only Tasmanian example still in pristine condition. The polje floods to perhaps a metre in depth in winter, and is dry for the rest of the year. We descended into it and walked around extensively – it is certainly of major significance. Ian Household and Rolan Eberhard, unlike Deb Hunter, tend to the view that 'Dismal land' will have minimal, if any, effect on the karst, but the appropriateness of such a 'development' is certainly open to serious question. However, it is happening. Sigh...

After Dismal Swamp we passed several other karst areas, including Redpa Caves. Redpa is fascinating in that it consists of Tertiary limestone immediately overlaying Pre-cambrian dolomite, with caves intersecting both stratas. Certainly unique in Australian terms, according to Ian. We finished up at the sea on Tasmania's west coast, and a nice sea-weathered outcrop of tertiary limestone! After an ice-cream (Arthur insisted..) we undertook the length trip back to Mole Creek. A great day indeed!

We arrived back about 8.30pm, and interestingly the hotel bar was devoid of ACKMA folk – although many snores filled the hall upstairs...!

Not everyone went to Gunns Plains and Dismal Swamp. Several intrepid members, including Grant Gartrell, and Pete & Libby Chandler followed David Butler on a trip through Croesus Cave. They all got through the 'Master Lock' unscathed; I'm told (as they should!)

The following morning saw a great many refreshed faces at breakfast, and many goodbyes – until our next meeting in New Zealand next year.

I cannot pass without expressing our grateful thanks to Cathie Plowman and the many Tasmanian PWS staff who assisted through the weekend, as well as Geoff and Trish Deer at Gunns Plains Caves, Nic Haygarth, David Butler and Steve Blandon, and others from *Northern Caverneers* who led many caving trips, and the management and staff at Mole Creek Hotel, and Mole Creek Guest House who hosted us so wonderfully.

If I've missed anybody, I apologise. All members greatly appreciated all their efforts in making the 2003 ACKMA AGM Weekend a most memorable experience.



The partly-constructed 'Giant Slide' at Dismal Swamp – ACKMA AGM Weekend