

A GATHERING IN ROCKHAMPTON

- Kent Henderson

Kent Henderson with Ann Augusteyn in Capricorn Caves Interpretation Centre



In mid June I was in Rockhampton on business for a week (funny how many of my business trips are coincidentally to cave areas!), whereupon I stayed with Dianne and Joe Vavryn at their home at *The Caves* – which is about 20 km north of Rocky. It was my first visit to the Central Queensland karsts since the 10th ACKMA Conference in 1993 – eleven years ago. It was great to be back, and I am most grateful to Di and Joe for their kind hospitality.

I had heard very positive reports on Capricorn Caves (3.5 kms from *The Caves*) from Andy Spate after his more recent visits, so I was keen to see what had occurred in the interregnum. Thus, one of my first actions was to contact Ann Augusteyn who, with her husband Ken, is the owner/operator. They very kindly invited me there immediately, and I spent a most pleasant afternoon and evening in their company. Upon arrival, Ann proceeded to give me the 'Grand Tour'!



The Conference Room
– Capricorn Caves Eco Lodge

I first viewed all the above ground improvements, starting with the Capricorn Caves Visitors Centre. The large interpretation area next to the ticket area/shop is incredibly good. Andy has been heard to say it is better than most at many publicly owned show cave locations in Australia, and I tend

to agree. The range and quality of the written, diagrammatic and visual interpretation is absolutely first class, and extremely well presented. Ten out of ten, Ann and Ken!

We then visited their new Eco Lodge – an all purpose centre – which features a large, excellent conference room with every conceivable conference facility, kitchen, bunk rooms, etc. Then there are new cabin accommodation units, landscaping, extended covered dining area, toilet blocks, kitchen, etc, etc. It short, Capricorn Caves can now truly be called a first class resort. Wonderful stuff! I came across Ken building a new outdoor adventure facility during my wanderings. It is definitely all happening!

It was then off to visit the caves themselves. Ann, together with Senior Guide John Giulieri, was kind enough to guide me through their “above ground” show cave. Of course, the caves are in tower karst, with the system having a number of entrances. Since my last visit considerable new wooden tracking had been inserted, allowing disable access to significant cave sections. That said, Ann and Ken’s next task, in my view, is underground.



Dianne Varyn at Bat Cleft



Old infrastructure – Chandelier Cave, Cammoo

A new accommodation cabin – Capricorn Caves



The lighting system, while adequate, is quite tired I'm afraid. They do have a very good cave, but a lighting update has the huge potential of making it exceptional. While the above ground facilities as developed are fantastic, their core business is the cave, and it deserves 21st Century lighting! Happily, it is on the agenda they tell me – sooner rather than later please, Ann and Ken.

After our tour, I was invited to a most pleasant buffet dinner in the caves restaurant, and a very convivial evening ensued. Many thanks, Ann and Ken, for your wonderful hospitality.



The entrance – Chandelier Cave, Cammo

Late in the week, on Friday 18 June to be exact, I managed to induce 'ACKMA Central Queensland' to join me for dinner at a pleasant Rockhampton Restaurant. Present were Ann Augusteyn (a former ACKMA Vice President), ACKMA Fellow Dianne Vavryn, Dianne's daughter Tania, Mary McCabe, Cameron James (the Senior Ranger-in-Charge of the Mt. Etna Caves National Park, and a former

ACKMA Executive Officer), and special guests – Dennis (an ACKMA Fellow and former ACKMA Treasurer), Carol and Geoff Rebbechi! Dennis, Carol and Geoff were on their way back to the Gold Coast after a holiday in inland Queensland, which took in several karst areas, including Camooweal. Geoff, of course, is now sole owner of Shades of Death Cave at Murrindal, Victoria (see the March 2004 ACKMA Journal, No. 55. p 21). It was a most pleasant evening indeed!



Dianne Vavryn at the entrance to Johannsen's cave, Mt. Etna National Park



Ann Augusteyn at the new outdoor adventure area (under construction) – Capricorn Caves

During the week Dianne and I climbed Mt. Etna to view the entrance to Bat Cleft. Dianne has run tours up the mountain in the summer months for the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service for over twenty years. The track up has certainly been much improved over the years, and I was particularly impressed with all the revegetation work in progress. Indeed, most of the native trees used for revegetation right across the

Mt. Etna Caves NP come from a native plant nursery Dianne and Joe set up a few years ago in their back yard. We also went to the gated entrance of Johannsen's Cave, an important ghost bat refuge, which is located opposite Mt. Etna.

Additionally, we went to Cammoo Caves, which are now government owned. The former show caves thereat (Chandelier and Flogged Horse) are now closed as such, and most of the former infrastructure (such as it was...) removed. Rather than repeat the story, I refer readers to an explanatory article from a previous journal (see *Cammoo Caves Change Hands*. D. Vavryn. ACKMA Journal 37, December 1999. p 39-43).



The former kiosk (work in progress)
– Cammoo Caves

The former kiosk area at Cammoo has been gutted, and is progressively being developed into an open interpretative area, with the plan that the Cammoo precinct will in due course become the 'gateway' to the National Park.

A circular walk is also under construction, with a number of trackside interpretive signs to be developed and placed along the route. The track, which we traversed, only passes one area of karst. Enough, perhaps?

As for the ex-show caves, their further use (if any) is quite uncertain and undecided. Dianne and I, with Cameron's permission, went through both. They each have their attractions, but in my view not enough to warrant their use as show caves – then, now, or in the future.

As an aside, the appalling 'underground toilet' in Flogged Horse Cave upon which I 'famously' photographed Dr. Kevin Kiernan in 1993, has been removed. Halleluja! All in all, it was a most pleasant trip, and it was great to catch up with local cave and karst happenings first hand.

'ACKMA Central Queensland' at dinner in Rockhampton. L to R: Geoff Rebbechi, Mary McCabe, Dennis Rebbechi, Carol Rebbechi, Ann Augusteyn, Dianne Vavryn, Kent Henderson, and Cameron James



The entrance – Flogged Horse Cave, Cammoo



The Eco Lodge – Capricorn Caves

