

A MYSTERY CAVE IN NEW ZEALAND

- Arthur Clarke

In early November 2003, during research for the book by Nic Haygarth and Arthur Clarke on the History of Cave Tourism in Tasmania, an old newspaper was found with an article about a "new" cave discovery in New Zealand.

Reported in *The Mercury* newspaper (published in Hobart, Tasmania) on 8 December 1883, the news item describes a dry horizontal cave with glow-worms located "...about 12 miles from Masterton, in the Wellington Provincial District..." in the lower part of the South Island. During subsequent email dialogue with Dave Smith and other cavers in New Zealand, this cave reported in 1883 was unknown to them... and a bit of a mystery!

Interesting timing really, because this early cave report was found just months after the publication of *Delving Deeper: Half a Century of Cave Discovery in New Zealand*.

On page 87 of this book, in a short section of text titled: 'Lower North Island', there is reference to the Blue Rock Glowworm Cave, but given that its location is south of Martinborough, it is probably not the cave described below. Assuming the cave reported in 1883 still exists and its location is correct, perhaps one of our New Zealand friends can locate this site for us prior to this next ACKMA Conference? The full text of the article follows:

REMARKABLE LIMESTONE CAVE

Another among the many natural wonders of New Zealand has recently been revealed. The Wairarapa Star, a paper published at Masterton, in the Wellington Provincial District, reports :-A discovery of considerable interest has been made in the heart of dense forest, about 12 miles from Masterton, in the shape of a subterranean passage extending about 462ft. through a solid limestone ridge. The

cavern performs the function of an immense culvert, not the least peculiar feature of which is that the water, drained from an extensive area of country, disappears below the surface of the ground at the upper entrance to the cave, and re-appears above the surface again about 132yds. below the lower extremity, while the floor of the cavern, except in times of heavy rainfall, is perfectly dry. The floor throughout averages 15ft. in width, and the walls, abounding in crevices or fissures, taper like the internal section of a hollow cone to a height of about 25ft. to 30ft. The upper portion of the underground passage for about half its length is formed of softer limestone, and the lower portion of harder limestone. This portion of the cave presents a truly wonderful picture. Long vaults on either side reveal a weird-like succession of beautiful alabaster grottoes, fringed and draped with every description of fantastic ornament. On every side rise massive columns covered with calcareous incrustations, and overlapping huge sheets of limestone, the result of the waters filtering through the porous rock or trickling through the fissures becoming charged with carbonate of lime and then evaporating. Beautifully formed stalactites hang like crystal pendants from every crag, and lustrous petrifications, operating like reflectors, remind one of the fairy caves in a splendid pantomine. The roof in places resembles the inside of a refrigerating chamber, from which are suspended sides of hams or carbonised pork or mutton, made radiant by millions of brilliant lights from a small kind of glow-worm. The floor consists of blocks of limestone that seem to have fallen from the roof, and the fragments are scattered about promiscuously. Indications show that the cavern has originally been of much greater length, as at the lower end, for a distance of about 60ft., the roof has fallen in, after which the cavern again continues for about 132ft.



The Pancake Rocks near Punakiki, West Coast, New Zealand, which will be viewed during the 16th ACKMA Conference