

# WOW! WEST COAST CONFERENCE STUNS!

- Kent Henderson

Dr. Paul Scofield displays a moa bone at Canterbury Museum – Pre Conference Study Tour



Well, it was predicted to be sensational, and it was, and more! For those who have just awoken from a very long coma, the 16th Australasian Conference of Cave and Karst Management was held on the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island from 10 to 17 April 2005. It was preceded by a five day Pre-Conference Study Tour departing from Christchurch, which I attended, and to which I shall first turn my attention...

## WEDNESDAY 6 APRIL

Having arrived in Christchurch the day before, and spent a very pleasant evening with old friends Pete and Libby Chandler, and Barry Richard; we were picked up at 10am by Geoff Schurr, our tour leader, and Russell Bromley, our bus driver. Geoff is director/operator of *Norwest Adventures*, which has run adventure caving tours and cave tubing in the Metro Cave System near Punakiki for many years. Russell is a Norwest guide, and (reputedly...) a caver extraordinaire!

There were fifteen on this trip, and with only one exception I knew them all – mostly very well! As well as Geoff and Russell, attending were ACKMA Life Member Chester Shaw; Barry Richard; Pete and Libby Chandler; Cathie Plowman and David Butler; Derek and Jill Mason; Tony and Pat Culberg; Serena Benjamin, and Mal Hansen. Mal was the only 'stranger' to me. But we all soon discovered he's a great guy! Mal works for NZ's Department of Conservation and is effectively 'Ranger-in-Charge' of Honeycomb Hill Cave at Karamea, which we were scheduled to visit during the upcoming Conference.

Our first port-of-call was to visit Canterbury Museum, where we were hosted on a tour by Dr. Paul Scofield, the Curator of Fossils. Anyone present who didn't know anything about Moas and Moa sub-fossils left an 'expert' some time later! The tour was great, and Paul also took us to many non-public storage and research areas, where we actually viewed much of the South Island's sub-fossil collection! Wonderful stuff!

After lunch at the Museum, we bussed off to a coastal spot a little to the south of Christchurch to visit Redcliffs Cave. This old basalt sea cave is an important Maori site, and was also formerly the site of significant archaeological/sub-fossil digs. The day finished with a lengthy bus trip north to Kaikoura, whence we checked into our hotel, and the local pub next door!

## THURSDAY 7 APRIL

On yet another sunny day (the often 'iffy' NZ weather was being most kind!), many of us headed off 'Whale Watching'. One company only, which is Maori owned and staffed, has the concession. It featured an excellent boat trip some distance out to sea, and we did see four humpback whales! On the way back we also viewed several hundred dolphins, and that was even more stunning, if anything!

In the afternoon, we went south along the coast a bit to visit a limestone wine cellar, a (sort of) man-made cave! After a tour and some imbibing, we next travelled the few hundred metres to the adjacent Maori Leap Cave. This is the only show cave in New Zealand I had not yet seen, and it was a key motivation for me to attend the Pre-Conference Tour. However, I will not here dilate upon it – a separate article will be found elsewhere in this Journal edition. The night was again spent at Kaikoura.



Delegates on a tour of the Holcim Cement factory  
– ACKMA Conference 2005

## FRIDAY 8 APRIL

We left Kaikoura heading West, arriving late morning at Pyramid Valley. The valley features a swamp, which is pretty much surrounded by limestone. The swamp is New Zealand's most important Moa sub-fossil site, and present to interpret was noted palaeontologist Dr Richard Hollaway. Outstanding stuff! In the afternoon, we arrived at Hamner Springs, where we were to spend the night. Hamner is famous for its hot thermal pools, which we made use of in abundance! Many also saw a great deal of the water slides, particularly Russell and Serena, both of whom made an attempt on world record for the most number of water slide descents in an afternoon... We couldn't get Chester Shaw or Barry Richard in the pools, but the rest of the group got wet!

Delegates infesting the Pancake Rocks at Punakiki  
– ACKMA Conference 2005



**SATURDAY 9 APRIL**

Today was slated as our caving day, to which many had eagerly looked forward! We headed off to Springs Junction and Lewis Pass towards Murchison where we were to spend the night. On route we diverged to a local farm, where it has been pre-arranged with the farmer that we could cross his land to Gibson's Cave. So, the party trogged up, and with a few exceptions, followed our 'caver extraordinaire' guide, Russell Bromley to this wondrous cave, which he had 'often visited'.

Chester and Barry Richard, a couple of ladies, and me, decided not go. Time passed. A couple of hours passed. Eventually, Derek Mason (who had initially gone some of way, and returned) and I went in search, and after a very long walk came back without locating the caving party. Eventually they did show up back at the bus. "So, how was caving", we cried? "We didn't find it" was the answer. Oh dear.... So, we then all loaded back on the bus, and ex-caver extraordinaire Russell drove us onto Murchison, his tail between his legs (although not for long!).

The night, at the historic Hampden Hotel, was great! Arriving that evening was the 'Peter Dimond Memorial bus' containing most of the Waitomo Caves crew – the likes of Van Watson, Angus Stubbs, Dave Smith, Greg Martin, Robert Tahurangi, Ephraim Emery, and Robin Henry. A big night followed! ....one of many to come...!

**SUNDAY 10 APRIL**

The Pre-Conference Tour arrived in Westport a bit after lunch, having experienced New Zealand's longest swing bridge on the way. After checking into our accommodation, many rested up, in preparation for heading to the Buller Workingman's Club later in the afternoon – our venue for the next week.

I arrived about 4.00pm, to be warmly greeted by our Convenor Convenor, Phil Wood (of *Phil Wood's Menswear*), Deb Carden, and progressively many others of my acquaintance! YES!!! The Family was gathering, and it WAS great stuff!

About 5.30pm, when most had arrived, we were honoured by an Official Maori Welcome Ceremony by the *Ngatiwaewae tangata whenua* (local Maori people). Greg Martin (an ACKMA Fellow and Past President – who speaks Maori!) was the respondent for the Manuhiri (visitors). The Formal Welcome was followed by dinner. After dining, Mike Slater (Regional Conservator, Department of Conservation) formally opened the Conference, whereupon Robyn McBeath (ACKMA President) introduced Professor Paul Williams, of Auckland University, who thereupon delivered his superb Keynote Address: *Searching for principles to guide sustainable management of karst: lessons from science*. A late night at the bar followed for many...

**MONDAY 11 APRIL**

After housekeeping from Phil Wood (of *Phil Wood's Menswear*), we were officially welcomed to Westport by Martin Sawyers, the Mayor of the District Council, whereupon it was into papers – a session chaired by Steve Bourne (who was destined for lofty heights later in the week!). The initial papers were scene setters. First up was Mary Traves (Conference Organising Committee Secretary) who gave us a *Regional Overview of the West Coast Karst*.

She was followed by Deborah Carden with *Where to now for the Department of Conservation, West Coast?* After morning tea Trevor Worthy delivered *Late Pleistocene diet of raptors at Kids Cave* and Geoff Shurr finished the session with *The Development of Cave Adventure Tourism in Ananui/Metro cave, West Coast, New Zealand*. All these scene setting papers were excellent, and gave attendees a great perspective on the area, and what we would see in field trips in the days ahead.



Claire Baker – the girl with the glowworm eyes!



In Honeycomb Hill Cave. Above: The Elephant's Feet.  
Below: Moa sub-fossils on display in situ.



After lunch, it was off to the Nile Valley and Geoff Schurr's operation in the Metro Cave System. *NorWest Adventures* offers two tours – one effective a 'normal' (and easy) adventure cave tour, suitable for anyone relatively fit, and a cave tubing tour – the local 'blackwater rafting' if you like. Delegates chose to go on one or the other. Having got wet in Metro some years ago, I was happy to take the dry route on this occasion. Geoff's operation is great from every perspective – space does not allow me to dilate on its excellences here. The new innovation since my last visit is the small-gauge train trip to the cave *NorWest Adventures* installed only a few years ago. Great stuff.....and off course, the truly spectacular karst of the trip to Metro Cave is just gob-smacking! A wonderful first day of the Conference! Just for the record, that evening the ACKMA Committee met, while delegates were entertained by a documentary on DVD of Arthur Clarke's trip to the Tsingy Karst in Madagascar, while yet a few others went caving in Te Hahi Cave.

## TUESDAY 12 APRIL

Our second day was a highlight – one of many! It consisted of a full day field trip to Karamea to visit Honeycomb Hill Cave – possibly the best Moa sub-fossil cave in New Zealand, and to the fabulous Oparara Arch – hosted by (my now mate) Mal Hansen et al. The trip's logistics (and given the rough terrain, there were many issues!) were arranged by Deb Carden with absolute military precision – I am told she had several sets of kittens over it. Well – it didn't quite go like

clockwork (you were dealing with ACKMA people, after all!), but it all pretty much worked. Well done Deb!

Honeycomb is effectively a show cave (unlit), with a tour company running a number of trips per day through it. It is very well developed, and interpreted. The walk through the temperate forests to get to the cave is great in itself! Oparara Arch is massive, bigger than the Abercombie Caves Arch if you believe the locals (all this rests on definitions, and I'm not buying into it!). Nonetheless, it was unanimously agreed to be magnificent!! Dinner that evening was at the 'Last Resort' restaurant in Karamea (followed by a late evening bus trip back to Westport). After dinner, we were blessed with two excellent papers, viz: Steve Bourne with *Palaeontological Surveys – more than just numbers*, followed by Rauleigh Webb with *Cave Permit Software – Design and Development*. Rauleigh had a few technical problems, but they were sorted out for a demonstration to interested delegates (and there were several!) the next day.

## WEDNESDAY 13 APRIL

Again, this day was split between papers and a field trip. The morning saw seven papers. Under the session chairpersonship of Andy Spate. we started off with an offering from Steve Reilly entitled: *Planning and Implementation of Cave Infrastructure for visitation*, followed by Kyung Sik Woo (presenter); Choi Don Won; and Kim Ryeon with *Geological Investigation of the Speleothems in limestone caves, Korea*. Both were excellent, but the third paper made many 'sit up straight' – when the irrepressible Dr. Claire Baker told us all about *Fake Caves and Real Glow worms: building an artificial glow worm cave* (I am looking forward to visiting here 'fake cave' in early June). Claire was followed by an analogous paper from Dr. Dave Merritt (Claire's former PhD supervisor, no less!) on *Bioluminescence and Behaviour of Glow worms*.



Captain Speedo makes an appearance!...

...as does *Dysformus woodsiae*  
– ACKMA Conference 2005



After morning tea, Julia James took the chair, and introduced three further papers, starting with Tim Moulds on *Guanophilic Arthropod Ecology and Conservation in Caves*. This was an exposé of his PhD studies in Bat Cave at Naracoorte. He was followed by Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith with *Reviewing Changes in Nature Conservation*. Elery's paper(s) are always a conference highlight, and this offering was no exception. Finally, Kim Thomas from Holcim Cement gave us a *Background to the Company* in readiness for our afternoon field trip to its quarry and cement factory.

Certainly, during the afternoon we were well looked after by Holcim Cement staff, both at the quarry and factory, which all delegates most appreciated. We also visited the nearby DOC *Showcase Site* – an excellent sea colony – expertly managed as one would expect, with top quality infrastructure and boardwalks.

It was then back to the Buller Workingman's Club for another massive dinner. In true ACKMA tradition, the conference catering was abundant. We effectively had five meals per day, and everyone went home to start a strict diet. Certainly I did. Sigh...

#### THURSDAY 14 APRIL

Our fifth conference day was our only full day of papers, and our only day of inclement weather – when it drizzled rain for most of the day. But we didn't care, we were inside. Every other pre-conference, and conference, day was fine. It was as if the Organising Committee had a direct line to the Almighty! Our

course, as Mary Traves was on the Committee, the Almighty would have had no choice but to play ball! We were very fortunate – in an area where annual rainfall is measured in metres, not centimetres.

The first session was chaired by Neil Collinson, Te Anau Caves Manager, and first up he introduced Jenolan Cave Guide, Dan Cove, who gave us: *Relighting of the Lucas Cave: a new approach to creating 'cave experience'* Well! I am not normally one for highlighting one paper over another (although will say the overall range and standard of papers at this Conference was undoubtedly the best ever), but Dan's paper was widely seen as 'the paper of the conference', and that is saying something! Judge for yourself, a version is published elsewhere in this Journal.

The next paper up was also superb, and fascinating. Jonathon Woods and Michael Kidd (presenter) gave us *Fibre Optics – a Different Approach to Cave Lighting*. This paper dealt with the recent re-lighting of Kelly Hill Cave on Kangaroo Island, South Australia, with fibre optics. As the ACKMA AGM Weekend next year will be on Kangaroo Island those attending will get to see it for themselves. I can't wait, myself! Professor Kyung Sik Woo finished the session with his excellent *Volcanic and Pseudo Karstic Sites of Jeju Island, Korea*.

After morning tea, we were to have Serena Benjamin (University of Tasmania) present her study of *Management of Agricultural Activities in Karst Environments: A case study of Gunns Plains Karst*, but technical trouble with her CDROM forced a delay until the following day. Instead, the program was juggled and we started with Tony Amar presenting *Anthropogenic Effects in Single Entrance caves* (Aranui Cave, Waitomo), followed by Julia James and Stephen Mehan (jointly presenting) on *Keeping the Jenolan Caves Blue Lake blue*. Both were excellent papers! Steve Bourne (presenter) and Dr. Liz Reed followed with *Managing Beyond the World Heritage Boundaries* – a most interesting look at interaction with landowners of surrounding karst lands at Naracoorte.

After Lunch, with Tim Moulds in the Chair, we moved to Stephen Swabey's paper, *Managing Debris Collapses into Streams* – a most useful offering!



All aboard the train to Metro Cave!

At the Conference Dinner. L to R: His Holiness Pope Derek the First, Deb Carden, and Professor Paul Williams – ACKMA Conference 2005



Neil Collinson followed with his excellent paper *Redevelopment of Te Anau Glowworm Cave* after which Mary Traves gave us a paper entitled *Karst Management in the Grey District*, a scene setter for the last day of the conference.

Two papers remained following Afternoon Tea, starting with Pete Chandler then told us all about putting up *The Cave of the Spirit* as a show cave in his paper *Recent Experience in Cave Development at Waitomo*. A 'technical' version is elsewhere in this Journal. Finally, with the indomitable John Ash having just arrived as witness, Greg Martin presented their joint paper on *Ruakuri Cave Development, Waitomo*. This massive 'new' show cave will be opened, many millions of dollars down the track, later this year.

Late afternoon, at 5.15pm to be exact (or thereabouts), the ACKMA Annual General Meeting was held. For the first time since 1985 we actually had an election – for the position of Australian Vice President. The candidates were Steve Reilly and Rolan Eberhard – the latter being elected by secret ballot. Pete Chandler was elected a Life Member, and Phil Wood (of *Phil Wood's Menswear*) and Barry Richard were elected as Fellows – all by acclamation, all most justly merited! Our new Conference Convenor, Dale Calnin, gave a presentation on the next Conference, at Buchan Caves in 2007, while the 2006 Annual General Meeting weekend went to Kangaroo Island, and the 2009 Conference to Margaret River in Western Australia. A truly great day was finished off with a magnificent hangi dinner!

#### FRIDAY 15 APRIL

So, to the penultimate day! First up, we had the three final papers of the Conference to receive. First up was Serena Benjamin with her delayed paper from the day before – well done Serena! She was followed by Tim Stokes with *The next step in karst management in British Columbia – transition to a results based forest practices framework*, and finally Travis Cross with *Best Practice Guide for Cave Management – DOC, and Studies in Bulmer Cavern, Mt. Owen*. Thus finished an exceptional bunch of papers. Particular thanks was given, with lengthy acclamation, to Phil Rutherford who had looked after the audio visuals for the week – he did a tremendous job! The by now obese delegates

also thanked the caterers! ...as we were now leaving Westport and heading south!

At about 10am we bussed off to Punakaiki, visiting the *Pancake Rocks*, en route. This wonderful karst feature (see front cover photo) was also the venue of the Conference photos – otherwise known as the biannual cattle drive. After a basket lunch, it was off for our next field trip to the Paparoa National Park – specifically to the Bullock Creek polje, for on a site discussion led by Paul Williams, Martin Abel, Chippy Wood and Deborah Carden. Several delegates went caving in Xanadu Cave. I declined, having visited this wonderful pheatic maze cave during the 8th ACKMA Conference in 1989. However, I did join a substantial number who tramped off visit Cave Creek – the site of the 1995 tragedy where the viewing platform collapsed killing many. It was a moving experience. That evening we dined (very finely too!), at the Punakaiki Rocks Hotel, which included the presentation of a number of Posters. Great stuff!

#### SATURDAY 16 APRIL

The final day – phew! We bussed off about 9am to Greymouth for a full day thereat. In the morning we viewed the local quarries, and visited Cobden Cave. In the afternoon, many did a coastal karst walk, some went boating, some shopping, some (such as I) toured the local brewery (hic!), and some merely relaxed.

And so, to the famed Conference Dinner!!! The traditionally 'dress up' Conference finale was held at Shantytown just out of Greymouth. What an occasion! To see ACKMA types even half well dressed is always a thrill (!!) The dinner was superb, the company fine! Yours truly was Master of Ceremonies yet again (oh dear!). I always thought that the Crocodile Farm Conference Dinner in Rockhampton in 1993 would never be beaten – but finally, it was! This was a truly outstanding night! Aside from the Conference Awards (to which I shall return...), we were favoured by an address from John Ash, who in all seriousness foreshadowed he was about to make a major announcement of a recent significant discovery, by none other than NZ's oldest and greatest cave explorer, Phil Wood (of *Phil Wood's Menswear*) – the final culmination of Phil's many (over the years) wild moa hunts (always, till now, sadly unsuccessful). John had all the boffins in the room completely spellbound!



Our 4 Korean Delegates – ACKMA Conference 2005

Cathie Plowman doing some voice training (and presenting a poster) – ACKMA Conference 2005



And then suddenly, John stripped off his suit, and Captain Speedo appeared! – seen only once previously at the 1997 Conference Dinner at Waitomo. Welcome back, Captain! His reappearance coincided with some frightful banging on the walls outside the room, which reached a crescendo as Captain Speedo rushed to admit “a creature”. It was Phil’s incredible discovery - *Dysformus woodsiae*!! A very strange looking bird with an enormous tail entered (which, for some inexplicable reason, looked vaguely – only vaguely – like Van Watson in real life). The bird made a triumphant circuit of the room before escaping – perhaps never to be scene again?!! Still, Phil’s now worldwide reputation as its discoverer will forever ring down the ages!!!

We also had a wonderful caver’s fashion parade, which engendered considerable mirth, and a couple of slide shows – one capturing the antics of the unstoppable Claire Baker! The ACKMA Almoner, Cathie Plowman, ran a raffle (which heaps of prizes) – with the \$NZ575.65 proceeds going to the ACKMA Life Member Fund. Well done Cathie and helpers!!!

As so to the Conference Awards! – chosen towards the end of each Conference by a nameless *Ad Hoc* Committee. Each lucky (?) recipient had to either use or wear their award, which was interesting, and often hilarious! The recipients, and their ‘prizes’, were as follows:

The Gloves Off Award (stiffy blue ladies gloves) – Neil Collison  
The Jigsaw Man Award (A spiderman Jigsaw) – Arthur Clarke  
The Furry Friend’s Award (A fluffy warmer) – Dale & Gail Calnin  
The Guano Award – for talking crap (a cow with an interesting rectum) – Tim Moulds  
The Female Body Inspector Award (a T-Shirt saying as much) – Russell Bromley  
The Hair Style Awards - they haven’t got any (head beads) – Angus Stubbs & Dave Smith  
The Claire Baker Perpetual lunacy Award (a T-Shirt saying as much) – Kyung Sik Woo  
The Joined at the Hip Award (handcuffs) – Cathie Plowman & David Butler  
The Playgirl Award (playboy rabbit ears) – Claire Fitzgerald  
The Putting Her Foot in it Award (socks with toes) – Claire Baker  
The Most Immaculately Dressed Award (Barbie stickers) – Pat Culburg  
The Elephants Never Forget Award (a toy elephant) – Steve Bourne  
The Brett Dalzel Perpetual Drinking Award (a beer mug candle) – Tim Stokes  
The Knickers in a Knot Award (frilly knickers!) – Deb Carden.  
And finally, ACKMA’s highest accolade, the Dr. Kevin Kiernan Gluttony Award – Geoff Deer.

Well!! After a stunning Conference Dinner, all that was left to do next day was wish many a fond farewell – till the next Family Gathering! Buchan Caves have a particular hard act to follow – but let me tell you, Dale Calnin and crew are up to it! See you there!



The train to Metro Cave -- ACKMA Conference 2005