



# Editorial Ramblings

So! I hoped members enjoyed the 'colour cover' of the last Journal – don't expect it very often...

Enclosed herewith are the full details and the Booking Form of our **2008 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WEEKEND** at Capricorn Caves in Central Queensland. It will, as usual, be marvelous! See you there!

The dates for the **Eighteenth Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management** have now been set: **3–9 May 2009**. The ACKMA Conference 2009 Organising Committee, headed by Jayme Hatcher, has already had several meetings, and without doubt our Margaret River Conference will be another stunner. PUT THOSE DATES IN YOUR DIARY NOW!

Also coming up is the **11th Cave and Karst Presenters Conference** at Jenolan, from **10–16 February 2008**. This biennial guide training experience is always well supported by cave and karst managers across Australia sending their staff, and undoubtedly this event will prove no exception. Full details, and the Booking Form, are herewith.

A bit of great news from Kiwi Land! The new bridge on the Ruakuri Karst Walk at Waitomo has now been completed. The former suspension bridge has been replaced and the track is open again. The new bridge is much larger and has no load limit. Good stuff! A photo, courtesy of Dave Smith, is below.



More excellent news... ACKMA member and Jenolan casual guide, Rob Whyte, reports: 'Jenolan guide Jeff Keith made a huge discovery at Jenolan in early July. A group of guides were conducting a routine training exercise which involved a wander through the caves and to look around at areas off the track.

'This is invaluable for answering visitor's questions like 'where does that go?' or 'where would the creek have flowed beyond here'. Whilst looking around off the track in one of the show caves, Jeff happened to notice something which wasn't quite rock-like and on closer examination revealed it to be a bone.

'Consultation occurred with the Australian Museum to confirm the bone as a jaw from a *diprotodon*. Unfortunately its location means it won't be possible to inspect the site on a tour.'

A few weeks later, a press announcement was made, which was reported worldwide. As an example, the following was posted on the *Sydney Morning Herald* online (27/7/07):

**Scientists find ancient marsupial jaw bone in Blue Mountains.** 'Scientists have confirmed the discovery of a jaw bone belonging to one of the largest known extinct marsupials. It is believed to be up to 40,000 years old and was discovered at the Jenolan Caves in the NSW Blue Mountains. The discovery of the jaw bone was made on a routine tour inside the caves. Scientists from the Australian Museum have now confirmed it belongs to a *diprotodon*, the largest marsupial that ever lived, and is between 20,000 and 40,000 years old.

Jenolan Caves spokesman Grant Commins says the bone is larger than usual. '[It's] about nine inches long to a foot long, that's just a jaw bone [and] that's a pretty big jaw bone when you think of it,' he said. This is the first known discovery of an Australian mega fauna fossil at Jenolan and is the closest yet found near Sydney.



The diprotodon jaw bone in situ.  
Image supplied by Ted Matthews

Great stuff indeed! I heard about it, in confidence, a few days before the press release. I understand the principal excitement is that the jawbone is likely to prove somewhat 'younger' than specimens found elsewhere, and thus could suggest the diprotodon existed with human settlement longer than originally thought. The Jenolan specimen is the closest to Sydney thus far found.

I subsequently phoned our President, Steve Bourne, who was likewise delighted to hear about it, although he was a little underwhelmed – given that he can readily put his hands on several tonnes of diprotodon bones (amongst much other megafauna) at Naracoorte!

The good news keeps rolling in.... The UNESCO World Heritage Committee, meeting in Christchurch, New Zealand, at its 31st session in June, inscribed three new areas on the World Heritage List, two of which are direct interest to us.

Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith, Dr. Julia James and Shizhen (and many others) worked on the nomination of the Southern China karsts (which Shizhen so wonderfully explained to us at Buchan); while Professor Woo Kyung Sik, Kim Lyoun (Ryeon) and Andy Spate (and many others) worked on The Jeju Island lava tubes and associated volcanic features (South Korea). The inscriptions read as follows:

*The South China Karst region extends over a surface of half a million square kilometres lying mainly in Yunnan, Guizhou and Guangxi Provinces. South China is unrivalled for the diversity of its karst features and landscapes. The site presents a coherent serial property comprising three clusters: Libo Karst, Shilin Karst and Wulong Karst. South China Karst represents one of the world's most spectacular examples of humid tropical to sub-tropical karst landscapes.*

*The stone forests of Shilin are considered superlative natural phenomena and a world reference. The cluster includes the Naigu stone forest occurring on dolomitic limestone and the Suyishan stone forest arising from a lake. Shilin contains a wider range of pinnacle shapes than other karst landscapes with pinnacles, and a higher diversity of shapes and changing colours. The cone and tower karsts of Libo, also considered the world reference site for these types of karsts, form a distinctive and beautiful landscape. Wulong Karst has been inscribed for its giant dolines, natural bridges and caves. Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes comprises three sites that together make up 18,846 ha, 10.3% of the surface area of Jeju Island, the southernmost territory of the Republic of Korea.*

*It includes: Geomunoreum, regarded as the finest lave tube system of caves anywhere, with its multi-coloured carbonate roofs and floors, and dark-coloured lava walls; the fortress-like Seongsan Ilchulbong tuff cone, rising out of the ocean, a dramatic landscape; and Mount Hallasan, the highest in Korea, with its waterfalls, multi-shaped rock formations, and lake-filled crater. The property, of outstanding aesthetic beauty, also bears testimony to the history of our planet; to its features and processes.*

The good news keeps coming – this time on the Burrup Peninsula rock art in Western Australia. Attendees at our Buchan Conference last May will

well recall the *Keynote Address* by Robert Bednarik on 'Australian Cave and Rock Art', and his plea for the protection of this incredibly important area. The following appeared in the *West Australian* (4/7/07):

*Ancient rock art on the Burrup peninsula in northern Western Australia will be protected, Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull says. Mr Turnbull said the 241 square kilometre area in the Dampier Archipelago included 99 per cent of the land where rock art was known to exist.*

*Rock art on the remaining one per cent will continue to be protected under WA legislation. Companies whose leases cover the rock art are committed to working around the sites of high heritage value. Where that is not possible rock art will be relocated in consultation with the indigenous communities. Experts believe the rock art on the peninsula in the state's remote north-west, is among the oldest in the world, with some of the art dating back 30,000 years.*

*Some of the carvings have been moved to accommodate initial work at Woodside Petroleum's proposed \$10 billion liquefied natural gas project, dubbed Pluto.*

Asked to comment, Robert Bednarik replied (10/7/07):

*My nomination of Dampier to National Heritage listing was accepted by the Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, on 3 July, after three years and three months of bitter struggle. However, only 241 sq. km of the 270 sq. km was listed, meaning there is ample scope for more industry to be established. This solves part of the problem, in that most areas may not be developed, but does not solve the emissions issue. The emissions are still set to more than double, almost treble perhaps, and we have acid rain already for 90% of the year.*

*However, there is a better piece of news. Today, no doubt prompted by the listing, the EPA rejected Woodside's application to build their new plant. That means a significant setback for the company's plan to use Dampier: they got the land a week ago, but now their permit to develop it has been revoked. In addition, we are engaging a team of seven lawyers, including several QCs, to proceed with litigation against the state government. In other words, we are still hopeful Woodside will see the light and build their Pluto plant elsewhere. They have no choice but to build, they already sold forward production for decades. That's where it stands at the moment. We have passed a milestone, but we still have a long way to go.*

Now for some very sad tidings, I'm afraid. Many members will remember Paul and Lee Stevens who attended our conference at Mount Gambier in 1999. Paul sadly died on 16 July 2007 after a very long illness. He was a past president and very active in the USA National Speleological Society for many years. I am sure all ACKMA members will join with me in expressing our deepest sympathy to Lee and family.

I talked on the phone recently with ACKMA Fellow Lana Little, the Ranger-in-Charge at Chillagoe Caves in North Queensland. Much is happening thereat. Considerable infrastructure updating has occurred in Donna Cave, with a ladder and some walkways replaced – with much more to come.

Partial funding has come through for re-lighting, but Lana suggested will delay the work, understandably, until the money is there to re-light whole cave in one hit. Hopefully, this will occur within the next couple of years.

Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith continues to 'wander the world'. He had four days in New Zealand recently attend a forum on *Conservation in Pacific Countries* – it wall to wall meetings he tells me. While the dates are not yet locked in he has trips to come to both China and Papua New Guinea, at least, before the year is out. I understand his application for Australian citizenship is likely to be approved if he stops in the country long enough...(!)

More good news! Andy Spate, our International Relations Officer, is recently back from yet another trip to South Korea. Given his long and meritorious service to the Jeju Island karst in particular, he has been created Honorary Citizen Number 615, Jeju Special Self-Governing Province; appointed a Member – Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes World Heritage Area International Scientific Advisory Committee; and consultant to the Korean National Commission for the World Heritage Inscription of the Korean Cretaceous Dinosaur Trackways Coast (KNCWHIKDTC). Try making that into a (pronounceable) acronym... Warmest congratulations Andy! Andy expects to be spending up to a couple of months back in Korea, probably from September, advising on the Dinosaur Trackways project. Andy is pictured below receiving his appointment to the Scientific Advisory Committee, along with Paul Dingwall (formerly of DOC, NZ, now working freelance for the IUCN) – engraved onto blocks of calcite (from China, they were continually assured...)!)



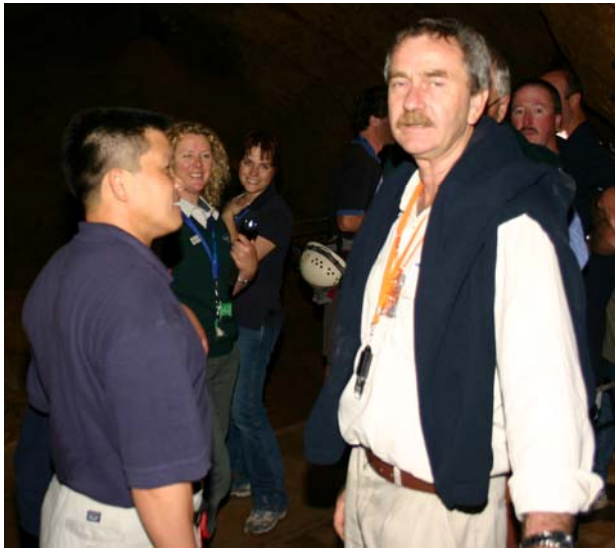
Indeed, Andy is held in such high esteem in Korea that the locals have even erected a statue in his honour. A very good likeness to...



Some hot news of our erstwhile President, Brian Clark – who has been incredibly busy indeed since his appearance at our Buchan Conference in May. In July he was in Kuala Lumpur where Mulu won the Malaysian National Tourism Award for best natural attraction. Warmest congratulations Brian!

If that wasn't enough Brian has just snagged three million (I'm not sure if it's dollars or Malaysian Ringgits, but either way it is still big bucks!) for a new visitor centre at Mulu, a further one million to develop Mentawai as a gateway to Buda National Park and yet another million to initiate a community co-management program for about to be legalized bird nest harvesting. This on top of the nine million he has already for Mulu facility development between now and 2010.

Brian is also applying for funding to provide solar/LED lighting in the two penan longhouses, a community waste management facility, money to do a solar/LED lighting system in Lagangs Cave and funding for a two year fauna diversity/abundance audit. The mind boggles! I always thought that if Brian had stayed at Naracoorte it would have had a five star hotel and casino there by now... Certainly, Brian will have much of interest to show us when we arrive at Mulu for the ACKMA AGM 'week' in May 2010!



Bian Rumei (left) and Brian Clark  
– ACKMA Conference 2007



Mick Chalker (left) with Steve Bourne  
– ACKMA Conference 2007

....and if that was not enough to keep Brian busy, the training and licensing of his park guides is getting underway – the industry has been given twelve months to comply. Brian also undertook a whirlwind tour back to Australia in July to set up a staff exchange and vocational training program between his local state's park and wildlife management body and various Australian park management agencies. Clearly Brian is as frenetic as Elery, and that is saying something!

There has been a rumour circulating recently that Mick Chalker is imminently to retire as manager of Wombeyan Caves. Mick and his wife Annette are currently on an extended long service leave holiday driving around northern Australia. I am very reliably informed he will be back on deck in September. So the rumour is untrue although, of course, like everyone else Mick is sure to retire eventually!

Housekeeping... The ACKMA Committee, at its last meeting, decided to discontinue Hard Copy production of ACKMA Conference Proceedings. Only the CD version will be produced in future. As a result, I have adopted a policy of publishing selected papers in this Journal, which I will do progressively. Several appeared in the last edition, and one, by Dr. Warren Peck, appears herein.

And finally:

Two guys are walking through the woods and come across this big deep hole. 'Wow...that looks deep.' 'Sure does... toss a few pebbles in there and see how deep it is.' They pick up a few pebbles and throw them in and wait... no noise. 'Jeez. That is REALLY deep....here....throw one of these great big rocks down there. Those should make a noise.' They pick up a couple football-sized rocks and toss them into the hole and wait... and wait. Nothing. They look at each other in amazement. One gets a determined look on his face and says, 'Hey...over here in the weeds, there's a railroad sleeper. Help me carry it over here. When we toss THAT sucker in, it's GOTTA make some noise.'

The two men drag the heavy tie over to the hole and heave it in. Not a sound comes from the hole. Suddenly, out of the nearby woods, a sheep appears, running like the wind. It rushes toward the two men, then right past them, running as fast as it's legs will carry it. Suddenly it leaps in the air and into the hole. The two men are astonished with what they've just seen... Then, out of the woods comes a farmer who spots the men and ambles over. 'Hey... you two guys seen my sheep out here?' 'You bet we did! Craziest thing I ever seen! It came running like crazy and just jumped into this hole!' 'Nah', says the farmer. 'That couldn't have been MY sheep. My sheep was chained to a railroad sleeper.'

