



## THE GREAT POST-CONFERENCE EXPEDITION FOR INTERNATIONALS

– Andy Spate

The Twelve Apostles plus one



In sickness and in pain, Brett, Albin, Tomaz and I left Buchan after the ACKMA Conference for Melbourne – followed by Doroteja, Lyoun (Ryeon), Moira, Travis, Shizhen, Bian, Emily and Mike. After various adventures in Melbourne (yet again reinforcing why I hate big cities – confusing roads, no parking and too many people!), we had picked up Alenka Hrib (also from Škocjanske Jame – she had been visiting relatives in Australia) from Melbourne airport.

Subsequently, thirteen of us set off in three full vehicles through the rain (and the city) wending our way to Port Campbell to intersect the limestone part of the Great Ocean Road. After some confusion and alarm when we tried to book into the wrong (and booked out) motel calm settled onto camp as we separated to various dinners and – surprise! surprise! a hotel.

This overly long day set the pattern to some extent for the rest of the trip – long days of driving with lots of caves in a short time (coupled with much wielding of digital cameras and the odd party...). So much so that it was all a bit of a blur to me especially as I was not at all well.

The next day we visited the Twelve Apostles (or whatever number were standing that week), Loch Ard Gorge, London Bridge and so on. This is one part of Australia that I had not visited before so I was impressed by this important part of Australia's limestone heritage, as were our visitors.

To the roar of overflying helicopters, Lyoun took one or two photographs... One very unedifying aspect of this day was the treatment of some visitors (not our party) by a *Parks Victoria* contractor at the Twelve Apostles Visitor Centre. This fine building is something of a surprise as it is virtually an empty shell with very few displays but good toilets.

We then headed across the volcanic plains of Western Victoria to a lunch of French prawns etc at Mt Eccles National Park. Several hours were spent exploring Lake Surprise and the various lava features. Much staring up trees led to some success at koala spotting. The incomparable Brett proved to be our star at this as well as much else through the trip. Then onto Naracoorte to spend a few days at the *Worryandrew* (usually misspelt *Wirreanda*) accommodation facility.

On arriving at *Wirreanda* we were a little distressed to find that we would be sharing the facilities with a group from the Clarendon Primary School in Adelaide. However, our dismay turned to pleasure at the welcome and hospitality that teachers and pupils alike extended to our group. In fact the meeting turned to the advantage of all, as we were able to give talks and show videos to the students and staff – and be entertained in turn by them. Thanks to Neil Beverley and his ‘family’. And while I am thanking people – Steve Bourne and all his people welcomed, entertained and informed us right royally at Naracoorte.



After the Slovenes had left – at the striking entrance to Naracoorte Caves Conservation Park

We were to spend the next few days at Naracoorte – but the days of driving were not completely abandoned, as you will see. Day one was spent in and around Naracoorte – caves, Wonambi, shopping and so on. Again Lyoun took one or two pictures... all those accompanying this article are a selection from fourteen (14) CDs that he somehow managed to fill – from Buchan to Sydney!

Back to the cars on day two – off to Princess Margaret Rose where we were again made very welcome by Jim Hanel. Cave inspection, bandicoot viewing, the inevitable group photographs and lots of laughs with Jim. Then back to Mount Gambier – lunch at Umpherstons Cave – Blue Lake, Little Blue Lake (where Albin and I became media stars yet again – the other eleven formed a paparazzi pack!). On to Tantanoola Cave via the Kongorong limestone pavements. Tantanoola, in spite of its small size, impressed as usual but recent changes to the lighting have not improved the scene very much.

As they say – when in Coonawarra, do as the Coonawarrans do – so on the way back to Naracoorte we stopped in at a couple of wineries although I am not sure why?

Very early the next morning, Albin, Tomaz, Doroteja and Alenka left us to drive back to Melbourne to fly off into the wide blue yonder to visit another part of Australia’s limestone heritage – the Great Barrier Reef.

They did arrive back in Slovenia safely as I have had a small package from them – thanks Albin and Tomaz. I took a sick day on that Wednesday so the reduced mob had a quieter day visiting various wild and adventure caves and the various sites around the Park.

Leaving Shizhen and Bian in the tender care of Steve and his boys and girls we climbed into the cars again the next day for an unexciting drive back to Melbourne Airport via Mount Arapiles. Here we unloaded Moira, Emily and Mike onto Nick White. The diminished band forged north toward Yarrangobilly. The night was spent in Khancoban so we could have a scenic drive along the western high country of Kosciuszko including bits of the Snowy Scheme.



Andy speaks to the students from Clarendon Primary School in the Wirreanda dining room

At Yarrangobilly we met up with some members of the Canberra Speleological Society who had been persuaded to give up their weekend to take Lyoun and Travis to some of the wild caves. Unfortunately some of their members were suffering from ‘flu as well so not all I had planned eventuated. However, Lyoun and Travis were able to see some of the gems of Yarrangobilly. After an emergency dash by Brett and myself to Tumut to obtain some more red liquids some parties were held with George and Nicky and Neil and others – again I am not sure why?

On Sunday afternoon we lost Travis and most of the Canberra cavers so that night was (a bit) quieter. The next morning John Brush (a new ACKMA member), Marj Coggan, Brett, Lyoun and I spent most of the day at Coleman Plains looking at part of the lower gorge and Murrays Cave.

Probably the highlight of the day was encountering 400-500 head of cattle grazing their way slowly up Long Plain – the last remaining travelling stock route in Kosciuszko National Park. John and Marj left for Canberra whilst Brett, Lyoun and I went via back-country fire trails to a remarkable dinner at Wee Jasper with my good friends Ian and Helen Cathles and my former high school teacher, George Webeck – always a remarkable occasion! And I can assure you that he would have put an awful lot of red ink on this piece of ‘prose’. Alright, George?

After a fabulously comfortable night in the Cathles’ five-star Cooradigbee Homestead we exposed Lyoun to the art and science of shearing sheep. I am not sure that Lyoun really enjoyed or believed this experience. But I am sure he enjoyed the Devonian fossils and a quick trip through Careys Cave with Geoff Kell. Thanks, Geoff for giving up yet another day for a visit by one of my hangers-on.



Marj Coggan and John Brush (Canberra Speleological Society) and the further depleted Expedition at the entrance to Clarke Gorge, Cooleman Plains, Kosciuszko National Park



Jim Hanel providing extra hospitality at PMR – taking Moira to the lookout. Lyoun assisting?

Into the car again to Yass to pick up Lesley Farquason and onto Wombeyan. Unfortunately Annette was off at a girl's night out so we missed her company but we invaded Chez Chalker where Brett cooked another one of his fabulous dinners – with the assistance of Master Kitchenhand Michael Chalker! Again an enjoyable night.



The almost completely depleted Expedition with Al Warild and Julia James at dinner in Sydney

A quick look at Wollondilly (with Dave Smith), Junction and Figtree Caves followed the next day – always impressed by these three caves and the new lighting in Wollondilly is excellent. Lyoun took a few pictures ...

Onto Jenolan via back roads again – and they were too rough according to Brett and Lesley – how was I supposed to remember that? At Jenolan we were able to fit in the Temple of Baal,

Orient and Lucas Caves and the new Nettle Cave development that afternoon and the next morning. What amazing caves Jenolan has! Also, and perhaps most enjoyably, we had a fine dinner in Caves House with Grant, Margaret, Ian, Anita, Barry and Robyn. That night we were very well housed in Barry and Robyn's Jenolan Cabins at the top of the Two Mile. I had not seen them before and they are a real credit to the Richards' initiative and hard work.



At dinner with Kitchenhand Chalker, Wombeyan

Brett and Lesley left for Yass so the International Expedition was down to two! Lyoun and I travelled to Sydney via Govetts Leap in the Blue Mountains and the Weidmuller factory in western Sydney. We stayed the night with Julia James who is a bit of a Korean fan like me – so Lyoun was presented with, and was most-impressed by, a very presentable home-prepared Korean banquet. The next morning I abandoned Lyoun at 0550 at Sydney Airport and was home in bed by 0900 – where I stayed for three days!



A good night out for Lyoun at Yarrangobilly

It was an amazing trip – including Buchan, Lyoun was able to visit nearly half of Australia's show caves and many wild caves – about 40 caves all up. And also have some great food and wine – and some *mekju* and *soju*! And take a few pictures – some 5636 in all are to be found on the 14 CDs! I wonder how many he deleted?

Although I was not at all well, I enjoyed the trip immensely. I have thanked a number of people above but many others assisted – please do not think I have forgotten you. Thanks to you all. But one person must be thanked above all others. Brett was fantastic – putting up with me and my muddles, driving, shopping, cooking the most wonderful meals and generally being a great companion! Surf and turf at Khancoban, for example! Gambei to you, Brett!!

