

Viewing platform in Glory Hole Cave, Yarrangobilly, with new stainless steel railing



YARRANGOBILLY RE-VISITED

– Kent Henderson

In late July I found myself in Wagga Wagga in southern New South Wales on business, and unexpectedly having an afternoon off I thought I would drive over to Yarrangobilly Caves for a quick visit. It was, I realized, more than a few years since I was last there. Sigh... Thus I phoned ahead, as you do, hoping to catch the caves manager, George Bradford.

However, the phone was answered by a very familiar voice, that of my old friend and ACKMA Fellow, Neil Kell! Neil, of course, lives in Tumut, and often does weekend casual guiding at Yagby. Well! George, as it turned out, was on holidays – at Margaret River in Western Australia (indeed, where else would a cave manager go on holidays except to another cave system?).



Neil Kell and Kent Henderson
in the Yarrangobilly Visitor's Centre

Thus it was that I motored into Yagby for a pleasant few hours with Neil. After the metaphorical back slapping, we wandered over to Caves House – a famous old building, fondly remembered by many as the scene of the meeting back in 1987 which formed ACKMA. Caves House has been closed to the public for a very long time, and had fallen (as it would) into some disrepair. However, in more recent years it has been progressively restored, with fresh painting inside and out, and now pretty much completely refurnished in 'period' style. It has been very well done, to the point where in the very near future it will be reopened as an accommodation venue once again. Excellent! The front section will be opened initially. For those that have not seen it, it has two wings – left and right of the entrance hall – each wing with several bedrooms, and its own kitchen, bathroom and lounge. A wing is ideal for a family stay. Bookings will be processed at the Tumut Visitors Centre.

Neil and I then wandered through Glory Hole Cave – Yagby's self guided option. As we approached the Glory Hole Arch the first thing I noticed was the absence of blackberries – in plague proportions last time was there. Top marks George! The entrance to the cave had a new gate – well done – though it's been there several years (shows how long since my last visit...sigh...). What I really wanted to see was

the new stainless steel handrails throughout the cave, completely relatively recently at a cost of about \$200,000. I was, as expected, impressed. It has been very well accomplished indeed and makes a huge difference to the cave.



Above – Yarrangobilly Caves House.
Below – period furniture in a guest's lounge.



Of course, the lighting is very tired, and the back-lit interpretative signage through the cave is looking quite tatty. A fair bit of *lampenflora* about, too... However, salvation, I understand, is at hand. Neil suggests George has secured, or is close to securing, the funds for a complete re-lighting of the cave. Excellent news! The quicker the better...

In other Yagby news, the caves now have, for the first time ever, two full time staff (in addition to George as caves manager) – Hanna Matthews (who has been there several years) and more recently Regina Roach as Interpretation Officer. Good stuff!

And what of Neil himself? He will be off to Margaret River later this year to commence work on re-lighting the Jewel Cave at Augusta, for which Jay Anderson has happily secured the funding. The bulk of the work will be done in the New Year after the holiday season. The whole job will be happily affected in more than good time for the 2009 ACKMA Conference, when we will get to marvel, yet again, at Neil's handiwork.

Jewel will be totally lit with LEDs. Indeed, David Head of *Weidmuller* suggests that diacroics will be a thing of the past within two years. Certainly LEDs can now match the luminance of the any other light source, with a far wider range of applications, and far less power draw, and heat.

The gate to Glory Hole Cave



Neil is also in the process of writing a report on re-lighting Škocjanske Jame in Slovenia – one of the world's greatest show caves. It is not unlikely that European Union funding will be gained for the project and clearly, if it comes off it will even further enhance Neil's already formidable international standing as a cave lighting specialist.



The old and the new in Glory Hole Cave
– new stainless steel railing and tired
back-lit interpretation signage.



A view from Caves House to the Visitor's Centre

Neil also has lighting jobs pending for more than one show cave in South Korea, and I'm advised the recent Tasmanian State Budget funded the re-lighting of Gunns Plains Cave (although when the money actually surfaces is another matter...). In short, Neil looks like being pretty busy for some years yet...

It was great to catch up with both Neil and Yagby – sorry I missed you George – next time!