

ACKMA members in the Guides Office at Jenolan Caves.
L to R: Dave Rowling, Barry Richard, John Callagan, Dan Cove and Scott Melton.



JENOLAN – A NEW VISION

– Kent Henderson

New tourist signage to Jenolan...
although I think a move towards electronic signage
for at least tours and tour times is overdue....



In late October I found myself in Dubbo, central New South Wales, on business and, finishing a few days early, I gave my old mate Barry Richard a phone call and promptly motored off to Jenolan Caves – which, I worked out, I had not dawned the door of for at least four years! Sigh...

Coincidentally, a concert was being held in the Grand Arch that Saturday evening, and I was promptly invited to attend. The act was called the *Rhythm Hunters* – a group of about a dozen drummers. Over 600 people attended – making for a very full Grand Arch. They were very good, but not really my style of music, although I was clearly in the minority. Of course, regular concerts in the

Grand Arch, and to a lesser extent in *The Cathedral* in Lucas Cave, are a great feature of Jenolan.

The next morning it was down to the Guides Office to be confronted by many familiar faces – it was great to catch up with Dan Cove, Ted Matthews, Scott Melton, Ian Eddison, John Callagan, and several others. The guides had just come out of a *Theme Meeting*, to decide on the future interpretation of Orient Cave, which is imminently to be re-lit (of which more later...).

My first port of call was Nettle Cave, Jenolan's new self guided cave. I had received considerable comment from others who had already seen it, with thoughts expressed being far from universally positive... Nettle is located high above the *Devil's Coachhouse*, where it has a number of gaping daylight entrances. It was the first cave discovered at Jenolan, and the first opened. However, it has been shut since 1932 (with several failed attempts over the years to re-open it) – until now. It is to a substantial extent more an 'open cave' than a 'dark cave', with craggy features, and some excellent craybacks.

On the positive side, its infrastructure is excellent. One enters through the *Devil's Coachhouse*, ascending to the cave, which has a turnstile entrance. One places the barcode of one's ticket into an adjacent machine, which admits you through the turnstile. The cave has good steel steps and raised pathways throughout, with stainless steel handrails. The lighting is mostly LEDs, with excellent track and feature lights.

The appallingly inappropriate steel stairway from Nettle Cave down the face of the Grand Arch



My one concern is that the feature lights are effectively on all day. Reportedly the feature lights switch off after about two hours of non-use of the cave, but given regular constant use this does not happen too often...

I would have liked to see trip switches before the main features in the darker areas of the cave with, say, a ten minute circuit – or else the beast of *lampenflora* is likely. Still, it should be a minor matter to correct in the scheme of things.



Barry Richard at the exit gate of Nettle Cave

The other thing I thought somewhat unfortunate was the use of high chicken wire next to the walkways high up abutting the *Devil's Coachhouse*. The aspect downward at this point is spectacular, but the chicken wire is a definite impediment to the view. It was placed there, quite reasonably, to prevent people throwing things downwards into the *Coachhouse*. However, in my view the use of clear Perspex would have been a preferable option – again, this could be addressed in the future with little difficulty. The high winds that on occasions whistle up to the Nettle might be minor problem with Perspex, but firmly anchored I would be surprised if it presented any difficulty.

What seriously annoyed me, and which has universally annoyed other ACKMA people who have already seen the cave, is the exit. An incredibly inappropriate exit has been created by placing heavily-engineered steel steps snaking down the front of Carlotta Arch across the right hand side of the front of the Grand Arch. It is ugly, and completely spoils the view of the Grand Arch entrance as you approach Jenolan. This madness, I hasten to add, was totally opposed by the guiding staff, but was insisted upon by the former General Manager of the Caves Reserve Trust.

Clearly, what should have happened is that a bridge should have been installed from the Arch Cave above, down into Nettle. The big Arch Cave entrance is adjacent to the top of Carlotta Arch, itself a very short walk from the top car park. Thus, the tour should, patently obviously, go in reverse to that currently, starting in the Arch Cave – down hill all the way into the *Coachhouse*. There was an old wooden bridge connecting the two caves which was only dismantled in more recent years. Indeed, its remnants are still *in situ* in Nettle! The current situation is sheer lunacy.

The ticketing for Nettle is interesting. One gets a 'free' ticket for Nettle with every ticket purchased for a show cave. I am not sure how much profit is made from offering an effectively 'free' cave, but I assume not much... Of course, the ticket prices of the show caves have been adjusted upwards, undoubtedly in 'compensation'. The 'argument' is that few would buy a Nettle ticket as a stand alone tour. Perhaps, but there are questions that obviously surround this assumption. Another question is how many visitors are actually availing themselves of the 'free' Nettle tour – anecdotally a smallish percentage – but the answer is not yet known as the barcode scanner at the entrance has experienced operational difficulties.

One excellent feature of Nettle is that each visitor is provided with a digital audio handset – a bit like one gets at a museum – which you press at numbered locations for an interpretive commentary. The commentary is very good, and presently is accessible in three languages. The downside is that a staff member needs to be regularly employed just to give out handsets in the Ticket Office and advise people how to use them, particularly on busy days (a very common phenomenon at Jenolan).

The batteries that power The Temple of Baal
– no problem with power outages here.



After Nettle, Barry and I wandered up to the Temple of Baal to meet ACKMA member Dave Rowling, Jenolan's head electrician, to look at his recently completed handiwork therein. I was most impressed; Dave has done an outstanding job. He has used a mix of dichroics and LEDs, mostly the latter. The effects he has achieved are better than world class – the thought put into the lighting is truly breathtaking. Classical music accompanies sections of the tour, and at points the lighting gives the impression of running water across the cave ceiling, and in another section, clouds. The feature lights are run by hand held C-Bus. The use of pin point LED's on many features is stunning. This is a cave experience *par excellence*. Go see it for yourself.



Dave Rowling with the digital control pad for The Temple of Baal – the entire lighting of the cave is controlled from this point.

Next we wandered into Orient, a very different cave to Baal. Its current lighting is very tired, at say the least. The cave is severely over lit, and conduit is everywhere obvious. Given the far greater difficulty of hiding cables in Orient (as compared to Baal), combined with the cave being so profusely decorated (it is really sensory overkill), Dave has many challenges ahead. Whilst in the cave, we discussed ideas for its re-lighting at some length, and I have absolutely no doubt the 'new' Orient will be wondrous. The funding is there, and the job will be literally started 'tomorrow' (after the aforementioned Guides Theme Meeting), and finished by next Easter. Dave will actually re-light Ribbon Cave first (which runs off the back of

Orient), then Orient itself. Thereafter he will move on to do the Pool of Cerebus Cave, following by River Cave (which is currently half re-lit). Thus all the show caves of the Southern Limestone will then be at world-leading standard.

After a pleasant lunch in Caves House with Dave and John Callagan, Barry and I then set out for Lucas Cave, the re-lighting of which was completed about three years ago. I had heard excellent reports on Lucas, and I was not disappointed. The railing throughout almost all of the cave is stainless steel (as it is indeed now throughout most of the show caves). There is small section of galvanized iron railing still to be replaced in the *Mafeking Section*, but this conversion is, I understand, imminent.

The lighting in Lucas is mostly dichroics, with some LEDs – the latter particularly for track lights, where they are especially effective. Remember that even three years ago, LED's could not perform the miracles they perform today. For example, the power draw in the Temple of Baal, which unlike Lucas is mostly LED, is about the equivalent of a toaster! And Dave tells me that in Orient the power draw will be half that of a toaster. Amazing stuff!



Dave Rowling pointing to fixtures and conduit in Orient Cave, soon to literally disappear...

Again, I was particularly impressed with the thought that had gone into the feature lighting in Lucas. At each major viewing stop, for example, a couple of feature lights come on in relay in combination with the forward track lights, to give visitors visual attractions while the guide (who comes last) catches up and then hits a hand-held C-Bus unit to bring up other feature lights. The movement of visitors through the cave is literally controlled by the lighting, as it should be.

I must say, however, I remain most unimpressed with the persistence of coloured lighting in the final chamber of Lucas. It is appalling. It is argued that it is kept for historical reasons. Rubbish. On that logic Jenolan should have kept its 110 volt lighting and rusted iron handrails... And while I was at it, I'd remove the coloured lights still in Chifley Cave as well. But if we must absolutely must have coloured lights – just one cave, please! Take them out of Lucas!

As section of high wire in Nettle Cave (to the left) designed to prevent items being thrown into the Devil's Coachhouse – would clear Perspex be better?



After Lucas, Barry and I lumbered off to Imperial Cave in the Northern Limestone (ie. one of three show caves on the Northern side of the Grand Arch; the others being Chifley Cave and Jubilee Cave). Imperial has been partly 'done'. It has sections of new stainless steel, and some newer lighting – but with much still to be done. Some 'experimentation' was done with fluoro tubes in several places a few years back, most of which are still there. Not good, but their demise will probably have to await the completion of the re-lighting of the Southern limestone show caves as discussed above.

Finally, we went into Chifley Cave, which was the first cave to be re-lit at Jenolan in modern times. Obviously the then technology was not quite what is available today, but it is nonetheless of a very high standard, and does not need further updating. Barry and I also went through a couple of former tourist sections (not now shown) – *The Architect's Studio* and *The Shambles*. Both sections have much to recommend them, and they could very easily be bought 'on line' as it were. In my view they could readily be shown on an 'Extended' or 'Historical' Chifley Tour, and I was delighted to learn from Dan Cove later when we returned to the Guides Office that this is definitely on the agenda.

So ended an intensive and enjoyable day at Jenolan. I must add that, in my view, virtually for the first time in my twenty-plus year association with Jenolan, it is now very much on track. The staff is focused, competent, yes even visionary, and within the foreseeable future Jenolan will

legitimately be able to boast that it is 'Australia's Premier Show Cave Location'. This boast has always been there, but frankly the reality was not. Sure there is much still to do, but it is happening. The management problems of the past have largely gone, and future is most rosy. Needless to say I, and many others, could not be more delighted.



The disassembled old bridge/steps between Arch Cave and Nettle Cave – still in Nettle Cave...

A Jenolan Sidelight...

During my recent Jenolan visit I caught up briefly with ACKMA member and casual guide, Rob Whyte. He subsequently emailed me:

'As discussed with you there is a bit of a problem at Jenolan right now, with many guides going around with their tongues hanging out. I will be the first to admit I am as guilty as the rest of them. To be honest it is a bit of a problem with the uniform. You know what its like when something doesn't fit right - something has to give. In our case it is the boot we wear. Many guides have taken to wearing alternate boots. I reckon they are the most comfortable boot I've been issued with but regardless it isn't long into the day when I realise I'm getting about with my tongue hanging out. I try my hardest to present a respectable image to the public but I know deep down they must think I'm a fool with my tongue hanging out as it does. I have attached a few photos to show the dilemma we face at Jenolan'.

An image (courtesy of Rob Whyte) of *the tongue hanging out* is below. Clearly, this is without doubt the most vexing cave management problem ever....

