

YARRANGOBILLY CAVES HOUSE RE-OPENED

and the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service's 40th Birthday

– Andy Spate

Colin Hoad and McKenzie Day cut the ribbon to re-open Yarrangobilly Caves House. McKenzie is the great, great granddaughter of George Day – founder of the Hoad/Day dynasty at Yarrangobilly.



Sunday 7th October saw a long awaited event at Yarrangobilly Caves. The single-story section of Yarrangobilly Caves House has been opened to public accommodation again – albeit on a reduced scale.

The re-opening results from decades of hard work from many NSW NPWS people –through a number of Yarrangobilly Caves Managers – with some nagging and assistance from yours truly. The person who really got it going and set the hard foundations was Jo Vincent (nee Ingarfield – a former ACKMA member). Michael Carr got the water augmentation and treatment going, Jo got it set up for fire protection, better kitchen equipment and, most importantly and the hardest part – the sewerage system.

The saga of this whole project could (but will not) occupy several issues of the ACKMA Journal. George Bradford – working hard and driving his bosses (I was going to say superiors) hard – has put in the final hard yards. Wonderful setup and furnishings – and the bureaucratic bullshit overcome!



Part of the Canberra Speleological Society display which included some of the ACKMA posters prepared for the 2002 CaveExpo in Korea.

However, it now all works and you can now stay at Yarrangobilly Caves House again. Bar service will be a few years off – but I am sure George is working on that issue. He will look great in white tie and tails serving you cocktails on the verandah! One of the greatest pleasures in life is an evening drink on the Caves House verandah and George's (and Nicola's) new furniture certainly adds to the experience!

But, back to Sunday...

More than 420 adults attended the event! With uncounted children!

As it was the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service's 40th Birthday it was clear that the Caves House re-opening would get tangled up in that event. This did not prove a disadvantage to the most important part of Sunday! The local aboriginal community had bush tucker and demonstrations of traditional craft manufacture. The NPWS provided displays and demonstrations. Tumut Rotary Club provided a wide variety of sustenance and the Canberra Speleological Society Inc erected a display of cave photographs and posters – many of which promoted ACKMA using the Korean 2002 CaveExpo posters.

But, back to the main event – the Caves House reopening!



Colin Hoad, Mrs Joyce Hoad, Professor Ebery Hamilton-Smith and Bruce Hoad outside the Yarrangobilly Visitor Centre.

Four generations of the Hoad/Day dynasty



Amazing... there were so many representatives present of the Yarrangobilly managers and guides going back into the very origins of European involvement – Hoads and Days aplenty. Unfortunately no representatives of the Bradley family were present.

Colin Hoad introduced the re-opening with a very moving and interesting account of the families that managed Yarrangobilly through the 20th Century. The re-opening was actually in two parts – Colin, and George Day's youngest great-great granddaughter, Mackenzie Day cut a ribbon at the top of the steps to Caves House. Mackenzie's elder twin sisters (great-great granddaughters of George), Emily and Caitlin, jointly pronounced the reopening of Yarrangobilly Caves House. The presence of Bruce Hoad provided a benediction. Not often does the Australian cave tourism world revive an earlier tradition.

There was not a dry eye in the house... there were so many people there with connections to Yarrangobilly. Local people, cavers, old time cave guides – you name it... I met with so many old friends amongst all those who attended – it was wonderful.

And now George and the NPWS have to get going on the two-story building...

GREATNESS IN CAVE INTERPRETATION

– Kent Henderson

Geoff Kell enthraling a tour group at his 'Show & Tell' table in Careys Cave



In early November, heading home from Jenolan, I called in at Wee Jasper to visit my old friend Geoff Kell at Careys Cave. Geoff runs this wonderful show cave on a shoestring – he is the manager, guide, caretaker, and 'tea lady' – the lot. And he is also the greatest cave interpreter I have ever heard (amongst very many...). Careys is a great cave, but with a very tired lighting system, and a 'shed' for a ticket office. It is in sore need of a proper visitor's centre, and re-lighting – we live in hope. Geoff more than deserves both. His dedication to the cave is truly outstanding.

Geoff kindly invited me to accompany a group of over a dozen mums, dads and kids on one of his tours. He starts outside the cave. The usual opening gambit of do's and don'ts is absent. Instead, he asks the kids how they should behave in the cave. Very soon he has elicited from them all the do's and don'ts, and the reasons why not – he hasn't set any rules, the kids have done that from him! All he does is charge the kids to keep a strict eye on their parents to make sure they don't break them! Stunning stuff – and the kids did keep an eagle eye on the mums and dads throughout the tour.

So onward into the cave. Again, Geoff gives little information himself, but draws it all out from the group, shows a few key examples, and answers the many questions his probing throws up. His style is infectious, and the group will later leave the cave highly educated and his life-long friends.

Further on, he sits the group down (many chairs are in the cave...), and goes through his 'lighting of candles' routine which he partly demonstrated to delegates at our Buchan Conference last May. The audience is enthralled, and out comes the history of the cave's exploration. Magic stuff. Then it is onto Geoff's 'show and tell' table, where the group gets to touch, hold ('feel the weight'), and look through an array of various speleothem forms, and selected other minerals in comparison. The group is engrossed – and their knowledge mostly comes from their questions, rather than from Geoff's patter. The group goes on to sit in another part of the cave. More eliciting questions, and enjoyment by all. Fairy Castles? No need! Geoff makes the science of the karst the enchantment.

Geoff is the consummate educator, which he achieves with considerable humour and a laid back style. If any cave manager wants to train his/her guides the answer is very simple – send them to Geoff at Wee Jasper.



Geoff with spellbound children (and adults!)