

# THE FAMILY GATHERS (AGAIN)

- Kent Henderson

Scott Hocknull (right) interprets the fossil dig in Capricorn Cave



It really is a wonderful occasion when the family gets together, and the 2008 ACKMA Annual General Meeting Weekend (17–19 May) was no exception. Over fifty members of the ACKMA family gathered at Capricorn Caves for the event – these numbers now seemingly the ‘norm’ in non-conference years.

The actual gathering was preceded, on Thursday 15 May, by Cathie Plowman overseeing an Interpretation Workshop for Capricorn Caves Guides, and on Friday 15 May, with Andy Spate running a Cave and Karst one-day workshop for staff from both Capricorn Caves and the local Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). Both were very well received. Indeed, I arrived in time on the Friday to sit through Andy’s afternoon session – wonderful, as always! By the Friday evening, all had arrived for the welcoming BBQ, with much back-slapping and ale drinking attending the occasion!

On the Saturday morning the ACKMA Committee met, while other members toured the Capricorn Show Cave. At 11am, all gathered for the 2008 Annual General Meeting. The meeting commenced with a brief Powerpoint pictorial on the life of the late Ken Augusteyn (put together by his son, Robert), followed by members standing for a period of silence in his memory (see my *Editorial Ramblings* herein for more details on Ken). All the 2008 Committee Reports are on the ACKMA Web Site *Member’s Only* Section. Rauleigh Webb has emailed the ACKMA list with the login details, but if any member hasn’t got them, email him. The Treasurer’s Report showed ACKMA in a sound financial position, and no increase in membership was recommended. The AGM voted to transfer \$5000 from the General Account into the ACKMA Life Member’s Fund. This fund is used to assist students in karst science or cave management to attend an ACKMA Conference, and possibly cave and karst managers from underdeveloped countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

There was a ballot for Australian Vice President, with Rolan Eberhard being re-elected. There were no other elections necessary, and the outgoing Committee was thus re-elected, except that we welcome Dan Cove from Jenolan to the Committee, who will serve as Interpretation Officer. Ann Wood reported on our Conference at Margaret River next May, and all is looking great – it will be another stunner!

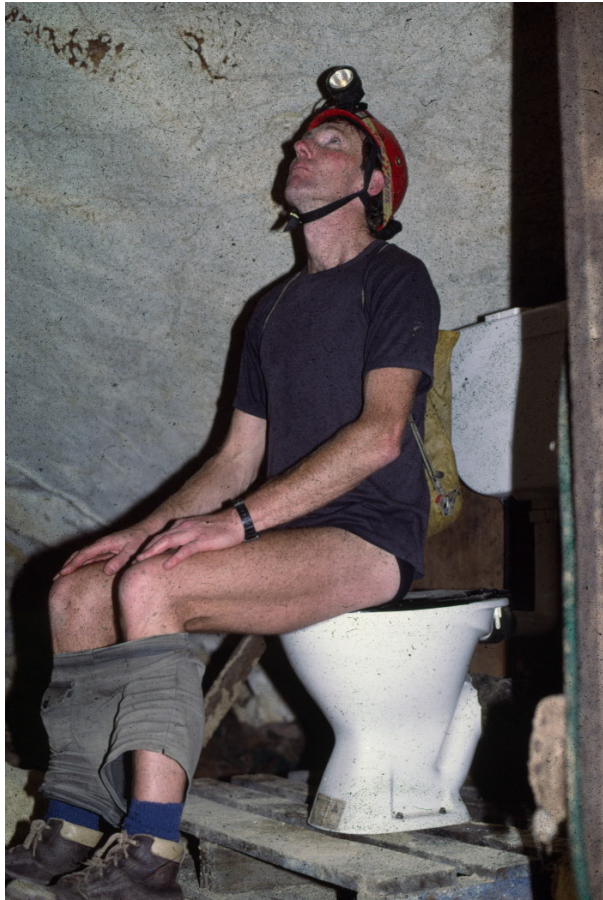
There will be a three day Post Conference Tour which will likely take in Rottne Island, Yanchep Caves and *The Pinnacles*. It is not unlikely there will also be a pre (maybe post) Conference tour over the Nullarbor. Full details will be in the Registration Pack which will be distributed with the September ACKMA Journal. Dave Smith advised that ACKMA Life Member Brian Clark is looking forward to welcoming us to Mulu for the 2010 AGM ‘weekend’ (which will be a week!). Indeed, a straw vote was taken of who present was likely to attend Mulu and over thirty hands were raised!



Scott Brook (right) addressing members at Cammoo Caves

After lunch, members entered Capricorn Cave for interpretation, by Queensland Museum’s Scott Hocknull, of the fossil dig undertaken therein. Excellent stuff! Mid afternoon the group moved over to the Cammoo Caves area in the nearby Mt. Etna Caves National Park, where we were addressed by Scott Brook, Ranger-in-Charge, on management of the Park – an excellent Powerpoint presentation. ACKMA Fellow (and part-time QPWS ranger), Dianne Vavryn, then addressed the gathering on the history of dispute between cavers and conservationists, and the cement company mining formerly Mt. Etna. Indeed, there was a handout detailing this history, written by Dianne and Peter Berrill, the President of the Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS), which all attendees received. Unfortunately there is no space to publish it in this Journal, but I plan to do so in the next (September) edition, thanks to the kind permission of the authors.

After the talks, members variously undertook the karst walk near Cammoo Caves, and visited Chandelier Cave (a former privately-owned show cave, now closed as such), and discussed general management issues. Many also went to the entrance of nearby Flogged Horse Cave (another former show cave), but its entrance area was deemed unsafe to enter at present. I well remember visiting Flogged Horse during the 10th ACKMA Conference in 2003. At that time a toilet was in the cave (draining effluent into the karst...sigh...). It has long since been removed! I have a wonderful photo of ACKMA Fellow Dr. Kevin Kiernan 'enthroned' thereon, which I publish below!



The Saturday night saw a wonderful dinner at Capricorn Caves. We were honoured by the presence of Coral Rowston, Manager – Ecological Assessment Group (QPWS), Peter Berrill (President CQSS), and Scott Hocknull (Queensland Museum). After dinner, Professor Elery Hamilton-Smith gave a brief address on his recent karst discoveries, which were fascinating; followed by the *Keynote Address* and Powerpoint presentation by Scott Hocknull on his fossil work at Capricorn Caves and within the Mt. Etna Caves National Park – which was very well received. Andy Spate, accompanied by considerable levity, conducted an auction of old cave books. It raised several hundred dollars, with the proceeds being divided between the ACKMA Life Member's Fund and the ASF Environmental Fund.

The Sunday saw us depart after breakfast for Mt. Etna. One group ascended to Bat Cleft, which was lead and expertly interpreted by Dianne Vavryn;

while the other group accessed the old limestone mine site, lead by Scott Hocknull and Peter Berrill. The former interpreted the fossils (with many members fossicking!), while the latter dealt with the conservation history of the site. Half way through the morning the two groups swapped over.

After lunch back at the Cammoo Caves area, members again split into two groups, with one visiting Johannsen's Cave (an important ghost bat site), under the leadership of Dianne Vavryn; while the other went to Ballroom Cave, with Scott Brook leading. Not surprisingly, many management issues were discussed! That evening, we dined (well!) at the Parkhurst Hotel Bistro just to the north of Rockhampton.

While some members departed, many stayed on till the Monday to do the Mt. Morgan trip. We bussed off first thing, and upon arrival members looked around the historic township. At 12.30pm we departed on a tour of the old Mt. Morgan Mine site, and the wonderful Fire Clay Caverns with their stunning dinosaur footprints in the ceiling. Many management issues were discussed, to say the least. I will not dilate here, but refer you to my previous article (the contents of which remain pertinent) – *The Fire Clay Caverns of Mt. Morgan* – in ACKMA Journal 56 (September 2004). This article is on the ACKMA Web Site.



Members in the Fire Clay Caverns, Mt. Morgan

The bus had members back at Rockhampton Airport mid afternoon for their flights out, with a few stragglers dining at *The Caves Pub* that evening. All in all, it was a wonderful weekend. Thanks are particularly due to Ann Augusteyn and her staff for the organization of the weekend, with special mention to the wonderful (and incredibly efficient!) Amanda Jennings. Likewise, our grateful thanks go to Rod Mackey and Scott Brook, and their QPWS staff, for all there efforts and support (in both staff time and money) – most appreciated. Also, our sincere thanks go to Scott Hocknull and Peter Berrill for there time and support, and to John Steinberger, and his daughters (and tour guides) Hieke and Eloise for their wonderful tour at Mt. Morgan. And finally, and most importantly, to Dianne Vavryn, for all her hard work and dedication in making our 2008 AGM Weekend the stunning success it was.