

Wombeyan Caves staff, present and past, at Mick and Annette Chalker's Retirement Dinner.



LEGENDS CELEBRATED

- Kent Henderson

L to R: Mike Lake, Jill Rowling, Penny & Armstrong Osborne & Kent Henderson.



What a wonderful event! About eighty colleagues and friends attended Mick and Annette Chalker's Retirement Dinner at Jenolan Caves House on Friday 28 March, including a large number of ACKMA members. Speakers included various associates of Mick and Annette over the years, with Andy Spate speaking on behalf of ACKMA. Our President, Steve Bourne, also spoke briefly and presented Mick with the ACKMA *Outstanding Achievement in Cave and Karst Management and Conservation Award* (a framed certificate).

A highlight was the presence and speech of inaugural ACKMA Life Member, Clive Stiff – Mick's long-term predecessor as Manager of Wombeyan Caves. Clive, now wheelchair bound, is over eighty, but still very lucid. His speech was a joy, and most humorous! Of course, at the end, Mick responded, modestly, as usual.

Mick and Annette received many gifts, mostly red wine (his long-term favourite tippie, of course). I did

manage to induce all attending present and past Wombeyan staff into a group photo – a valuable record indeed.

Personally, it was great to catch up with many cave luminaries, some of whom I had not seen for quite some time. Of the many tributes, perhaps the one that fully encapsulates Mick's achievements was a letter read out from Alan Griffin (who unfortunately would not be present in person). It read as follows:

I send my very best wishes to Annette and Mick tonight, along with sincere apologies for my absence. This celebration of two fine careers is one I swore I would not miss, and yet, frustratingly, the weekend has coincided with my parents 60th wedding anniversary celebrations.

I'd just like to say, and I'm sure I'm adding to the general opinion, that it was a pleasure to work with Annette and Mick who had a special knack for making colleagues, guests and visitors to Wombeyan feed incredibly welcome. They made a unique team, and their enthusiasm, professionalism, warmth and hospitality created a unique environment, which we've all, at one time or another, been very fortunate to enjoy.

I know Mick will be the first to commend Annette on her invaluable contribution – her support and capacity to turn her hand to whatever needed to be done, keep the place ticking over and keep Mick in line have to be applauded. I know Annette often put in long hours and tremendous effort to ensure the customers were happy and the day-to-day business attended to – she's been a rock and a great employee. Thank you, Annette, for your valued contribution.

It's not easy to find the right words to adequately describe Mick's career. His started out in 1970 with a review which judged his performance to be 'excellent' and continued from there.

His leadership in cave management, particularly in the delicate balance of conservation and tourism needs is recognised throughout the community. His contribution to developing karst management as a science and in passing on his knowledge and experience to other cave managers both in Australia and overseas has been acknowledged by ACKMA where he served as President, and to which he was subsequently elected a fellow and life member.

Mick's natural warmth and environmental knowledge created a great visitor experience at Wombeyan while ensuring the fragile and irreplaceable cave foundations were well protected.

Mick provided extraordinary leadership to the guides and staff throughout his management career, fostering and promoting excellence in client service and in developing multi-skilled and responsive work teams at Wombeyan. The blend of sensitive conservation of a remarkable geographic spectacle combined with user-friendly cave tours stand as a tribute to the sustained effort Mick has put in over 30 years of dedicated service.

Finally, over the years, Mick engaged, managed and fostered relationships with a diverse range of stakeholders involved at Wombeyan. He demonstrated a real ability to garner community interest and support for projects that will ensure the Reserve will be enjoyed by successive generations. Of particular note is his relationship with the traditional landowners of Pijar, Gandungarra and Wiradjuri and their

representatives. His record of ensuring the indigenous people are involved in initiatives at Wombeyan was achieved in a sensitive and characteristically unobtrusive manner.

Mick's shown determination, dedication and commitment over much of his life to preserve and protect the Wombeyan Reserve so visitors can continue to enjoy and marvel at this natural wonder. It's a commendable career and he's a remarkable man.

Annette and Mick are a great team – may they pull together long into the future. I wish them every happiness.



Clive Stiff addressing the gathering

All in all, it was a memorable night – but fear not, Mick has solemnly promised to be present at ACKMA Conferences and events over the years to come. Thus, his knowledge and insights will be readily available to us well into the future.

We wish Mick and Annette a glorious retirement. They are planning to spend a bit of time in Queensland later this year, and travel on an extensive tour in Europe next year. Wonderful stuff!



The happy couple!



Wombeyan Guides past and present –
Frank (left) and Ken Fleming.



Dave Smith (Wombeyan Guide) presents
a gift from staff to Mick and Annette



Lynn and Barry Cubitt (Abercrombie Caves)
with Andy Spate



The throng at the dinner



ACKMA President Steve Bourne presents
a Certificate to Mick Chalker



Simon and Rachel Chalker



The Guest of Honour responds...



Andy Spate addresses the dinner
on behalf of ACKMA