



Editorial Ramblings

Well!! Enclosed herewith is the Registration Form and full details for the **18th Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management**, to be held at Margaret River, Western Australia on **3-9 May 2009**. It will be stunning! Ann Wood and her Organising Committee have put together an excellent program. **NOT TO BE MISSED!** The Rego Form is also on the ACKMA Web Site at: <http://www.ackma.org/conf2009/index.html> There will also be a one-day Pre Conference tour to Yanchep Caves (ex Perth), plus a three day Post Conference Tour.

On 16 June, Elery Hamilton-Smith and I traveled over to Naracoorte to attend the 'unveiling' of the restored gravesite of William Reddan (pictured below), the first manager of Naracoorte Caves. It was a great occasion indeed - an article is elsewhere herein.



Some New Zealand news... Neil Collinson from Te Anau Caves in South Island is now, happily, almost back to full health after his car accident, on which I reported in the last Journal.

Neil advises that: 'Visitor safety has recently been enhanced at Te Anau with the installation of twelve rock bolts to a section of ceiling within the caves.

'As part of monthly checks, guides reported slight movement (locking of pins on a sliding rod) to the

OPUS Geologists who oversee the monitoring program. Following their site inspection it was decided that although movement was minor (1-2mm) it would be prudent to install a number of bolts. Located approx. 15m height, the monitoring and inspection is done off ropes. For the installation of the bolts scaffolding was required to provide a suitable working surface for the drill. Geovert was commissioned to undertake the drilling and installation works.

The Department of Conservation was consulted throughout the process and gave their approval. Because of the location high above the walkway, rock bolts have been painted and blend in to the cave colours. Indeed without drawing attention to the site with a torch it would be hard to observe the bolts. The timing of the work was unfortunate with the caves closed for a two week period over the school holidays. Operations are now back to normal'.

From one Neil to another... As will be noted elsewhere in this Journal our resident lighting expert, Neil Kell, has been busy at Gunns Plains Cave in Tasmania, with a number of 60-70 hour weeks! ...but he is still fairly frantic. Since returning home, as well as doing some guiding at Yarrangobilly in the snow, he has sent a profile to Oman for Maljis al Jinn Cave, stuff for Lana Little for Donna Cave at Chillagoe, and advice to fix problems in Cutta Cutta Caves. Onwards and upwards!

An announcement of the new lighting for Gunns Plains Cave appeared on the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service website on 18 August, as follows:

A new electrical and lighting system will ensure that Gunns Plains Cave welcomes visitors to an improved experience. Labor Member for Braddon, Brenton Best officially launched the major upgrade of the electrical and lighting system at the cave south of Ulverstone today.

'The completion of this project will ensure that Gunns Plains Cave continues to be a strong attraction that delivers a quality visitor experience while protecting the unique cave environment,' Mr Best said.

'The electrical and lighting upgrade focussed on two areas: ensuring the safe movement of visitors through the cave during normal tours; and in providing appropriate emergency and atmospheric lighting. These types of projects are a combination of lighting design, lighting technology and resource conservation and management.'

Mr Best said the new 24 volt LED (light emitting diode) lights throughout the cave will use less energy, produce less heat and therefore reduce the environmental impacts on the cave. The system will also cope with flooding that the cave experiences from time to time.

'The upgrade was a cooperative effort between between experts such as Mr Neil Kell, local

contractors Shane Hill Electrical Pty Ltd, the cave operators, Geoff and Trish Deer, KarstCare volunteers and Parks and Wildlife Service staff,' Mr Best said.

Gunns Plains is one of Tasmania's oldest visitor caves, having opened on January 6, 1909. It attracts about 10,000 visitors each year. The \$220,000 electrical and lighting project is part of the Parks and Wildlife Service's Priority Asset Maintenance Program that has included upgrades to visitor facilities in parks and reserves around Tasmania.

Hastings Caves and Thermal Springs in southern Tasmania has a new manager. Beth Russell took over in the role on 14 July 2008.

Keith Vanderstaay (Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) Coordinator of Visitor Services) advises that 'Beth has previously worked for the PWS at Huonville and Dover and was instrumental in the development of a Parks shop at the Huonville field centre.

'Although Beth left the service about three years ago, she has had a long association with Hastings and is well qualified to take on the stewardship.

'Beth has participated in a number of initiatives and projects completed of the past few years. These include relighting of Newdegate cave project, the development of a customer service charter and guidelines, regular audits of safety standards at the Thermal Springs pool and other OH & S audits. These works and other initiatives have resulted in raising the bar for visitor safety and service.

'PWS Southern Region Manager, Ashley Rushton, said he is confident Beth will build on these achievements and continue to improve the visitor experience at Hastings Caves and Thermal Springs.'

I am sure all members will join me in wishing Beth well in her new role, and hopefully we'll get to meet her at the ACKMA Conference at Margaret River next May.

In other Tasmanian news, Marakoopa Cave at Mole Creek re-opened on 5 August, six weeks after a rock fall near the entrance resulted in the cave being closed to the public. Wet weather caused the rock fall and was also responsible for delaying the work required to re-open the cave.

The steep slope above the cave entrance needed to be stabilised before the cave could be re-opened. This involved staff working on ropes to check the stability of rocks on the steep slope and to dislodge any loose rocks. It was quite difficult work that covered an area of about 50 metres wide by 150 metres above the cave entrance.

I heard from Brian Clark at Mulu recently. He's looking forward to seeing many ACKMA members at Mulu for the May 2010 AGM 'week'. Brian advises visitation at Mulu is frantic. His recent peak season

this year seems to have extended through to September and beyond.

He has some exciting new projects coming on line, including a new show cave – which will be 'WOW!' he says (I have NO doubt!). The new Mulu office, Interpretation Centre, and Café complex is due to start construction in a couple of months. Brian has also recently overseen the updating of the pathway in Deer Cave and he reports it is now a vastly superior experience than previously.

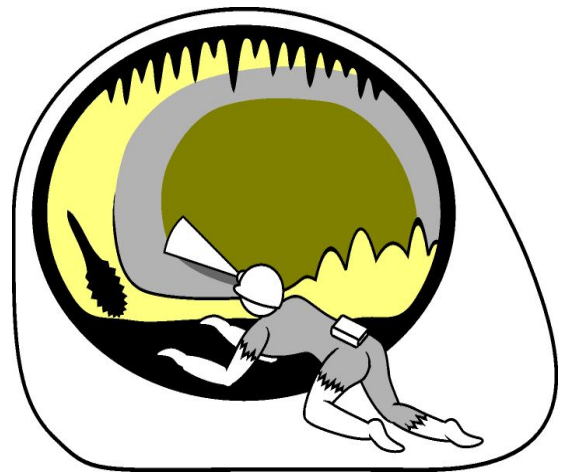
Lots of research activity is also happening at Mulu, and the latest being a string of ten film crews coming and going over the next few months! Brian says: 'It seems like the world is just discovering us or something. Weird!'



Brian Clark wearing fashionable indigenous headwear – 2006 ACKMA Conference

The 27th Biennial Conference of the Australian Speleological Federation (Karstaway Conference) will be held from 4–9 January 2009, at Sale, Victoria. It is being hosted by the Victorian Speleological Association, the Caving Club of Victoria and others. The Conference Logo is below. The Registration form is now finalized and has been placed on the conference website:

<<http://www.caves.org.au/conf2009>>



Another noted cave luminary has left the scene. ACKMA member John Callagan recently retired as guide at Jenolan Caves after many years. A Retirement Dinner for John was held at Jenolan

Cave House on 15 August. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it, but many did! It was reportedly a great occasion.

On hearing of John's retirement, noted ACKMA raconteur, Elery Hamilton-Smith, wrote: 'I recall a day which demonstrated just why John stays in my mind as one of the great guides! Three busloads of Chinese visitors had been booked in at 11.00 am but they actually arrived at the peak time of the afternoon program. Virtually all guides were taking tours and all caves were full up! The visitors were upset because they could not go on a tour; Nigel Scanlon was going out of his mind, and then John came back from doing a minor job.

'Nigel said, 'John, can you do something with these people' and briefly explained. John picked up a torch and ambled out, then called out, 'Hoi People – have I got a tour for you! Nobody else has ever done this tour!' He took them on the walk up to the top entrance of the Lucas, then down again and through the Devil's Coach House to the Playing Fields (I can't quite recall, but I think they then went back to the concourse by way of the Carlotta Arch). Anyway, by then he was able to take the whole three busloads on a Lucas Cave tour.

'They were so pleased with the total tour and all that John had told them about Jenolan that they took up a collection and made a significant donation to the bush fire brigade funds!

'So farewell to John and Phyllis – may all your personal tours from now on be as good!'

I am certain all ACKMA members will join with Elery and me in wishing John and Phyllis a very happy retirement, and thank him for his outstanding contributions over the years.

Andy Spate and Ian Houshold, et al, have spent the last couple of months driving around the north of Australia doing a survey of sandstone karst. Maybe one (or both) of them will have something to say in the next Journal...

Upon his (brief) return to Canberra Andy was due to race off to the Geo-Tourism Conference in Perth (attending along with more than a few other ACKMA members) to present a few papers, then immediately thereafter fleeing the country to spend a few weeks karsting around in Korea (yet again). He doesn't expect to be available for interview until at least mid October....

I was driving in Queensland recently, listening to the radio (as you do), and an item came on about Dismal Swamp in north-west Tasmania. Members will recall that *Forestry Tasmania* built a 'giant slide' into the swamp (which is a karst polje) a few years back as a tourist attraction – not to universal acclaim, it must be said. (see: *Dismal Swamp – Model Development or Karstic Fun Park?* by Roland Eberhard. ACKMA Journal 64 – September 2006).

The radio story reported that the venture has lost \$100,000 in the past year, and that it was thought

that the name was turning people away! Possibly, but I suspect that the fact it is not located on a through-route to anywhere would be a bigger factor.

Anyway, *Forestry Tasmania* is reportedly looking for a new name for the 'attraction'. Radio listeners were asked to phone in with suggestions for a new name. Some of the suggestions were 'Poverty Ponds', 'Happy Lagoons', and 'Merry Mudhole'. Yes, well... probably marginally better than 'Dismal Land' previously suggested by a Tasmanian ACKMA member...



Above: The Slide at Dismal Swamp. Below: A view of part of the Infrastructure. Photos: Rolan Eberhard.



Well, how to 'Save the Planet', and stuff the Nullarbor... The following 'Pearls of Wisdom' appeared on *ABC Online* on 29 July. I understand that the author is chance to be pushed down a large chasm to reflect on the karst ...and I am certain many ACKMA members will be there to watch!

Nullarbor Limestone to Reverse Climate Change by Tim Kruger

The millions of tonnes of limestone underneath the Nullarbor Plain could reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere to levels not seen since the 18th century.

Cquestrate, founder and chemical engineer, Tim Kruger, is proposing that limestone, like that under the Nullarbor, is processed into lime and

then added to the world's oceans to increase its ability to absorb carbon.

The ocean is already the world's naturally greatest carbon sink, absorbing two million tonnes of the seven million tonnes emitted annually. When lime is added to the water it can double the amount of carbon absorbed. Mr Kruger says that the lime won't just address carbon emissions but other environmental issues too.

'It also helps offset another problem which is called ocean acidification, which is where too much carbon dioxide has got dissolved into the sea water.'

The idea was first developed in 1995 but was scrapped after the energy cost of mining and processing the limestone was too great. However, Mr Kruger says with alternate energy sources now available, such as solar on the Nullarbor Plain, the project is now viable.

'What we know is the cost of energy depends on location, there are many places in the world where energy is stranded.'

'So what this process does is it uses the energy which currently doesn't have any value and that makes this process economical.'

He says it would be a huge amount of limestone to be mined, but it is possible.

'To remove the amount of carbon dioxide we emit into the atmosphere each year you would need about ten cubic kilometers of limestone which is a huge quantity.'

'Much bigger than the amounts that we current mine, but it is possible to do and there is plenty of limestone.'

Some housekeeping – would contributors to the ACKMA Journal (we need more, by the way, it seems the same old names pop up, not that I'm not grateful for their support) please do not send me tiny images for inclusion.

Ideally, images need to be at as high a resolution as possible (like at least one megabyte!). Low resolution images means fuzzy photos when printed, while high resolution images mean great printed photos. Please assist!

A timely reminder that members should always check their undies:

A British teenager has said she was 'shaking head to toe' when she discovered a baby bat curled up in her bra after investigating 'vibrations' she believed to have come from her mobile phone. Abbie Hawkins, 19, of Norwich, said she was quietly doing her job as a hotel receptionist when she decided to examine the 'strange movements' in her underwear.

'I put my hand down my bra and pulled out a cuddly little bat.' Ms Hawkins explained that the undergarment had been in her bedroom drawer after being washed the day before.

(Launceston Examiner – 12 July 2008)

BULLER RANGER HONOURED

by Joanne Carroll



Buller ranger Deborah Carden with her fellowship certificate which recognises her work with caves.
(Photo: Joanne Carroll)

Punakaiki's Deborah Carden has been recognized for her extensive work in caving. Ms Carden has been made a fellow of the Australasian Cave and Karst Management Association. She has been a member of the association for 12 years and writes periodically for the association's quarterly journal. She received her fellowship certificate at this year's annual conference in Queensland, Australia.

'I was very surprised and pretty pleased. It was cool to be recognised by the association.'

Ms Carden works for the Department of Conservation (DOC) and is heavily involved in protecting and conserving Buller caves. Of the 180 caves listed in Buller, she helps actively manage 20 from Charleston, to the Paparoa and Kahurangi National Parks.

Her aim is to preserve and conserve the caves. The caves are home to unique formations and fossils but are highly susceptible to damage by human interference. She works with tourism operators like Norwest Adventures which brings people through the Metro Cave at Charleston, as well as individual cavers, to monitor and prevent changes.

She has written a cave monitoring system for DOC currently being trialed in Buller before being rolled out nationwide.

The News. Westport, New Zealand, 22 July 2008. Members will recall that on Page 50 of the last Journal I published a Press Cutting concerning caver Geoff McDonnell being trapped in Bouverie Cave at Wombeyan and his subsequent rescue. The following article appeared on *ABC Online* 13 August 2008, which I re-print below without comment.

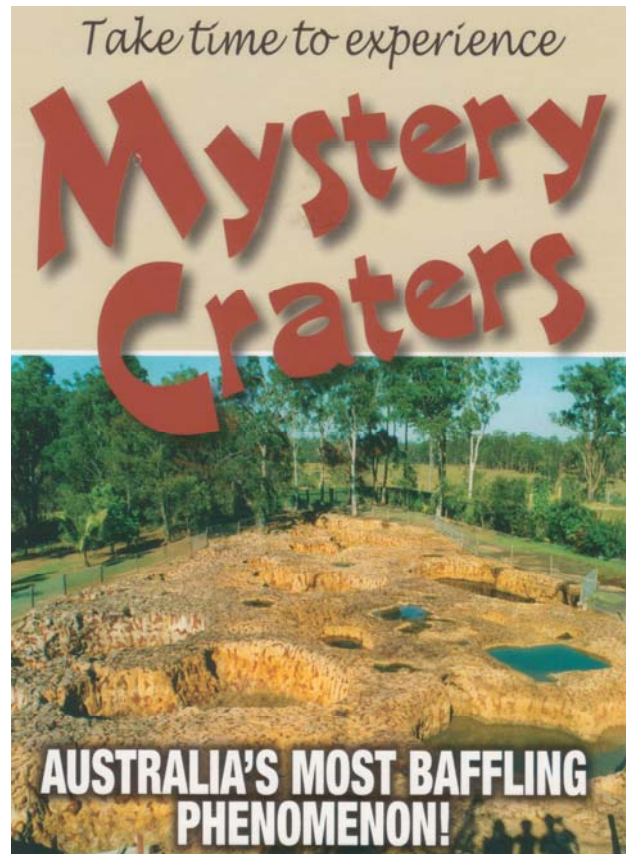
Caver to pay for 100-person Rescue

A lone caver who sparked a rescue effort involving at least 100 people when he became trapped for two days has been ordered to pay \$15,000.

Geoff McDonnell, 47, had entered the cave illegally when a rockfall trapped him in a standing position in the New South Wales southern highlands in May.

The Sydney man drifted into shock without water or medication. Authorities were contacted the next day when other cavers noticed him missing, but it took until the following night for him to be freed from the Wombeyan Caves. McDonnell was charged with entering a cave without authority and risking the safety of those in a park.

Today the Goulburn Local Court heard McDonnell was an experienced caver, but the incident had damaged his reputation. Magistrate Geraldine Beattie said at least 100 rescue personnel worked to save McDonnell and the operation had caused environmental damage to the cave. He was fined \$3,000 and ordered to pay \$12,000 in compensation for his rescue in the Goulburn Local Court today.



Recently, whilst on business in Bundaberg in central Queensland, I drove out of town to visit the 'Mystery Craters' at South Kolan, a local tourist attraction – located about half way between Bundy and Gin Gin.

It is not a karst site (though possibly pseudokarst?) but certainly it is of great geological interest – if only because it is, evidently, unexplained by science. When a farmer decided to clear some of his land for growing zucchinis back in 1971, he stumbled across a 'mystery' that has, reputedly, baffled science. He promptly turned it into a 'tourist attraction', with attendant gift shop, etc.

The blurb handed out at the site reads:

Despite more than 200 internationally renowned geologists showing up to investigate over the years, none can explain the presence of over 30 craters that are more than 25 million years old. The rock there is completely unique, and when it rains heavily, water seems to flow into the upper craters rather than the lower ones. Many explanations have been offered over the years, the most interesting of which is that they're footprints. But the footprints of what? An ancient prehistoric animal, or some kind of hitherto undiscovered supernatural monster?

Part of the Elliott Formation, the secrets of the craters formed in a massive slab of sandstone, siltstone & red ochre have baffled teams of international geologists and to this day still remain a world-proclaimed unsolved mystery.

An interesting feature is the even distribution of the red ochre through the coloured sandstone as if it was once churned in a giant cauldron. Other interesting features are that three of the large craters resemble large footprints and that some of the craters hold water whilst others do not. The craters are not considered to be volcanic, but are believed to have appeared later. On the walls of some of the larger craters there are strange markings which are notably recessed; as if man made.

Theories put forward for their origin include:

- Part of a meteorite*
- The roof of a subterranean lake caused by oil pressure underground*
- Was the edge of the ocean and is the result of sea action*
- Sink holes from volcanic action*
- Hot spring activity*

They did look, to me, like sink holes, but any of the above theories may be possible I suppose – other than, one has to say, the supernatural prehistoric monster footprints... I have searched the Internet for scientific comment, without success. Maybe one of our members has a lead?

In any case, if you are in the area, it is probably worth the six dollar admission fee to have a look.