

# WHAT'S HAPPENING AT CAVEWORKS?

– Jayme Hatcher

Senior Guide, Deb Austin, on the new stairs into the Lake Cave doline



It has been a very busy year for me taking on the new role as *Attractions Manager* only ten months ago; I hit the ground running. To kick start the year we celebrated the Jewel Cave 50th Anniversary of its discovery, with discoverers Lex Bastin and Lloyd Robinson joining us for the event. The Jewel Cave Preservation and Conservation project followed not too far behind by, as well as a scoping study for the new project, management plans, wildflower tours, lighting strikes, refurbishment of stairs, new brochures and tickets, website upgrades, and scientists and research. Like everyone I am sure this year has been jammed packed. I would touch on the highlights at *CaveWorks* this year.

## Jewel Cave

Jewel Cave is about to undergo a major redevelopment, which includes re-lighting the cave, new buildings and infrastructure, removal of the existing car park off the cave, and revegetation of the site and interpretation. The project is expected to cost around the \$3.1 million and for a not-for-profit organisation it has been hard sourcing this sort of grant money. It has been a frustrating process to say the least, with the change in Federal government last year and then the change in State government this year. As a result we have been in a holding pattern waiting for grant approvals for a while now. However everything is now ready to go and we are just waiting on the final approval from the State government for the grant money. We hope to hear about late November.

## New Project

We have an exciting new project we are about to embark on, but I can not disclose too much information yet. We are currently preparing a scoping study to look at the viability and demand for a new cave tourism product in the Margaret River region. All I can say is it is very exciting project that will combine culture, Margaret River's biodiversity hotspot, climate change and Megafauna in the Southwest. We have been privileged to have some great assistance with the planning of this new initiative, particularly from Steve Bourne, Dr Gavin Prideaux and Rob King from South Africa's *Cradle of Human Kind*. The information they have provided has been insightful and very valuable.

## Management Plans

*CaveWorks* has recently been working with Subterranean Ecology to develop management plans for the Lake and Mammoth Cave precincts. It is expected these plans will be adopted soon.



Palaeontologist Grant Gully  
in the CaveWorks laboratory

## Visiting Scientists

*CaveWorks* has recently hosted two scientists who are continuing their ground-breaking research in the Leeuwin Naturalist Ridge. Dr Pauline Treble is looking into past rainfall records through the dating of speleothems, via oxygen isotope and mineral deposition in calcite crystal formations. She has been researching the rainfall records of the past 800 to 1000 years. Her research will give an indication of previous rainfall fluctuations.



between ice ages, climate changes and other extremes. Dr Treble and Professor Ian Fairchild went searching in the Easter and Moondyne Caves for active formations, but unfortunately they were unsuccessful as the caves were too dry.

Dr Gavin Prideaux and his team have been working out of the *CaveWorks* laboratory for three weeks recently. His research has been ongoing for twelve years and is nearly complete. He has been investigating the extinction of the Megafauna and the reasons for its extinction.

He will release a paper outlining his findings later in the year. *CaveWorks* management appreciates the value of scientific research in the Leeuwin Naturaliste ridge; this area is unique in fauna and flora species and being one of only thirteen internationally-recognised *biodiversity hotspots* in the world.

### **Stunning Wildflowers at the Caves**

This year we also launched *Wildflower tours* at all our sites. Walks were offered for two months; allowing us to diversify our product and encourage the visitor to stay longer at the cave sites. The Wildflower walks have been a hugely successful and allowed us to tap into a new market that was not previously being taken advantaged of.

We were able to secure specialist wildflower guides to conduct the walks and visitors were blown away by the diversity of flora in the Leeuwin Naturaliste ridge. Wildflower walks were package with Cave tours and retail items to increase the visitor spend.

Western Australia is unique for wildflowers but they are not so well known in Margaret River region. The region boasts over 150 orchid species with some 2500 wildflower species documented at each cave location – so it is a great experience to be able to offer to visitors.



Silky Blue Orchid – Margaret River

### **Works Programs**

This year has seen the Lake Cave doline stairs being refurbished. Stage 1 – the top walkway has been replaced with beautiful Jarrah and the entrance stairway into the doline is currently being refurbished and upgraded.

The *CaveWorks* kids corner has been undergone some major changes with new interpretation and interactive displays. It is looking fantastic and we can't wait to show members at the ACKMA conference next year.

### **Filming at Mammoth Cave**

Mammoth Cave may be the next backdrop for a Western Australian feature film. It will be the first feature film to be made in Western Australia by Murdoch University.

We look forward to meeting everyone at the 18th ACKMA Conference at Margaret River next May.



Resource Officer, Gabriel Magyar, working in the Jewel Cave  
– Jewel Cave Conservation and Preservation project