

At the Buchan Caves 'Recommissioning' Ceremony.
L to R: Elery Hamilton-Smith, Dale Calnin and Kent Henderson



BUCHAN BUZZES!

– Kent Henderson

Will McCutcheon (left) officiates at
Buchan Caves 'Re-commissioning' Ceremony



On Friday 5th December, I undertook a flying visit to Buchan for the day, to attend the 're-commissioning' ceremony of the Royal and Fairy Caves after their recent significant upgrades.

After morning tea (you often need prior sustenance for these events...), a party of about thirty gathered in the Caves Reserve for what was (mercifully) a couple of brief speeches.

Elery Hamilton-Smith and I were present to represent ACKMA, and we got a mention in the *List of Dignitaries* present – a nice recognition of ACKMA, rather than us personally.

The 'officiating' was handled by Will McCutcheon, *Parks Victoria's* Chief Ranger for East Gippsland. He (deservedly) heaped praise on Dale Calnin and his staff for their excellent efforts. Dale was in fine form, and (again deservedly) chuffed by the recognition.

After the formalities, it was off for the obligatory tour of Royal Cave. \$700,000 has been spent overall recently in Royal and Fairy. Both caves now have significant LED fittings, although there are still many areas to be upgraded. I was particularly impressed with the new LED track (emergency) lighting – which will stay on even in the event of a power failure. I thought the casings and lighting to be particularly well done. As all good track lighting

should be, you can see the track, but not be blinded to everything else in the process. Of course, Dale knows what he's about!

The *Font of the Gods* in Royal Cave – its most famous feature – has been particularly well done, with substantial below-water LEDs now *in situ*. The effect is far superior to the previous (over-lit) lighting. Very well done indeed. A significant amount of stainless steel railing is now in the cave, particularly in the Princess Royal Chamber – excellent. However, much more is needed....money, of course (only Stage One of several stages is complete...). Currently, I'd describe Royal as about 'half done'. When it is complete, it will be pretty much as good as it gets.



New LED track light fitting in Royal Cave



New Stainless steel fittings in Princess Royal Chamber – Royal Cave.

As those many who have been to Buchan will recall, the caves have historically been a significant repository of chicken wire. Much of this has, happily, been removed from Fairy Cave over more recent years, but it is, to my mind, still over-represented in Royal Cave. Some is to be left in Royal for historical reasons – fair enough – and admittedly some areas really do need the protection, but there are still many sections where, in my view, the 'eye-sore' of chook wire is protecting nothing significant and should be removed. Of course, this is an emotive issue for cave guides in particular, and not just at Buchan. Mick Chalker's 'battle' with chook wire – ultimately successful – at Wombeyan springs to mind. Fear not though, Dale is onto it...

The 'Official Party' – L to R: Dale Calnin (Ranger in Charge Buchan), Chris Rose (Regional Manager East), Will McCutcheon (Chief Ranger East Gippsland) and Andrew Minack (General Manager Commercial Business).



A considerable amount of money has been expended above ground as well. \$80,000 has been spent on a new bridge near Fairy Cave, and \$60,000 on heritage rock walls in the Caves Reserve. A new toilet block near the Swimming Pool at the Dukes Cave efflux has also been completed. This toilet block is no doubt very functional, but I am not certain it fits in with environment of the Reserve. I tend to think avant-garde architects should be shot (figuratively, of course...) as they approach any cave area. While this new Buchan toilet block is not as bad as some other disasters (such as the 'cow milking stands' shelter opposite the Guides Office of the Jenolan), it could have been constructed with considerably more aesthetic sensibility in my view (and doubtlessly at a cheaper cost). The Interpretative Display section of the Buchan Caves Visitor Centre also springs of mind – a very highly priced 'architectural wonder' that is grossly functionally deficient compared to what it could have been. Still, nothing is perfect – but Dale is well on the way to achieving something fairly close to it inside Royal and Fairy. I suppose if we can at least keep the architects above ground that would be a big plus!



A new LED multiple array track light in Royal Cave.

After an expansive lunch, the attendees headed off to tour Fairy Cave. Most unfortunately, I had to miss out; I had to hasten back to Melbourne. Such is life, but I must add to the praise levied by Will McCutcheon – Dale and his staff have done, and will continue to do, a fantastic job at Buchan. Of course, we expect no less!