

John Callaghan in a 1970s Department of Tourism poster.



CELEBRATION OF A CAREER AT JENOLAN – JOHN CALLAGHAN The end of an era

– Jenny Whitby

The name John Callaghan is synonymous with Jenolan Caves. When John announced that he planned to retire, no way was this baby quietly going to slip out of the valley. This guy is far ‘more popular than a pork chop in a synagogue!’ (a famous John Callaghan saying!) Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust in conjunction with JCH&PS organised a farewell dinner for him, that was attended by about 150 people. People came from near and far. Many current and former staff attended. Former guide Phil Maguire and his wife, got up at 3:30am that morning to catch a plane from Perth, just to be at the dinner! People came in droves from everywhere, tourism industry colleagues, Historical Society members, family, and even some speleos!

John spent from 1970 till 2008 working in the caving industry, that’s 38 years! 33 years of those were at Jenolan. A life sentence is assimilated to 30 years imprisonment, so yes John had truly done his time at Jenolan. This was a labour of love though.

At the Retirement Dinner
– L to R: John Culley and John Callaghan



John himself said on the night ‘this place gets in your blood, and you never forget it’. He did the other 5 years at Tantanoola Caves in South

Australia if you were wondering. John was the first appointed Manager, under the Millicent District Council, after the Lane family discovered it in 1930. He was instrumental in the concept and design of developing the Tantanoola Cave for wheelchair access, and was involved in the construction thereof. Tantanoola Cave was the first wheelchair accessible cave in the Southern Hemisphere in 1983.



John Callaghan with a retirement gift.

He did do a lot of hard labour at Jenolan, as has carried many bags of cement through the caves. (I'm sure working in the Jubilee was his favourite!) He built alot of paths, and did much stonework along the path edges, and trowelling of cement. Geez life as a guide can be pretty hard. He was also one of the foundation members of Jenolan Caves Historical and Preservation Society (JCH&PS) and was an original committee member when we first started in 1972. The idea of the Society first stemmed from the guides, and John was involved in the dismantling and reassembly of the Old Post Office. He is a life member of JCH&PS.

During his time at Jenolan he has seen a lot of change in the operation and management of Jenolan from the Government running in the Department of Tourism days in the 1970s. He has seen the takeover of Caves House numerous times by private leaseholders through to today with the Jenolan Caves Reserve Trust in charge. He has worked with many people, including several modern day Jenolan 'legends'. He himself was described as one on the night by a colleague.

His retirement was called the end of an era. There were pre dinner drinks in the lounge, then a dinner was held in Caves House, with only a few tables in

the corner left for Caves House guests that evening. There were many speeches. He was described as; a legend, a superstar of Jenolan Caves an inspiration and man passionate about Jenolan, a magnificent guide, a man who provides incredible insight, a wonderful source of information, a great friend, and a fair dinkum true blue Aussie.



The crowd at pre-dinner drinks.

It was estimated that in this time that he did a staggering 20,280 cave tours at Jenolan, of which 8102 of the Lucas Cave. I have no idea how they came up with this figure, but it is impressive. No one took a guess as to how many Jubilee tours he actually did.

John and his partner Phyllis Calvert are moving to the mid north coast, and are building a new home at Donnellyville, just south of Macksville, NSW. We wish them a happy and healthy retirement. Jenolan won't be the same without you both.

