

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

– Steve Bourne

Ulcerated bats – Naracoorte Caves



The countdown to Mulu continues to what looks like will be the largest ACKMA gathering ever. Brian stressed the need to be reasonably fit and having been there before I know the terrain and climate is energy sapping. So, off the lounge and start the exercise program!!

The news for Naracoorte's bats continues to be bad. Deborah Carden and I found white lesions on over 50% of the population when they returned to Bat Cave in spring. Elery informed me that he had seen lesions like this in the past but the cause had never been determined. We have had amazing support from a number of agencies and institutions and have undertaken quite a comprehensive investigation. Adelaide Zoo vets visited and took samples from anaesthetised bats, surgery on the micro scale. Most lesions are parasitic but pox lesions have also been identified. This is particularly significant as pox viruses have not been detected in bats previously (that we can find in the literature). A full report will be provided for the next journal.

Rolan Eberhard contacted me to discuss management of fossil research in Tasmania's caves. Really interesting DNA work on Australian megafauna is being done in Prof Alan Cooper's

laboratory in Adelaide. Researchers only require individual bones for testing so unlike other palaeontological investigations, complete skeletons or structured excavations are not required. It is another one of those interesting challenges we face as cave managers. How do you keep track of material removed from the cave and data associated with it, when it is likely that most of it will be ground up for analysis? How much should be removed? There are no easy answers other than ensuring rigorous data collection with all fossil removal.

Kelly Hill Caves are having a re-light after the failure of the optic fibre system. Weidmuller are supplying their fantastic LED lights developed in conjunction with the Jenolan team. There are also plans afoot to upgrade Naracoorte and Tantanoola Caves and pleasingly, we will be able to use all existing electrical infrastructure.

Francine Errico, CEO of Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association called me to advise she has resigned the position to move to the USA with her husband. Francine has secured several grants in her time there which will see Jewel Cave redeveloped, as we saw in May at the conference. I enjoyed many discussions with Francine on cave developments and wish her well for the future. There is an opportunity to take on one of the more challenging jobs in caves and tourism.

We had another first for Naracoorte in October. Kent brought a large contingent from Melbourne and we had our first Freemasons meeting in Blanche Cave. Apparently all went well and further expanded the list of functions that Blanche Cave has hosted.

Deborah Carden has accepted a three year contract to manage Naracoorte and Tantanoola Caves and I am staying in the role I accepted 12 months ago. I spend more time in the light than I used too!



Van Watson (left) with Steve Bourne – ACKMA Conference 2009, Margaret River.