



PROGRESS AT THE WAITOMO GLOWWORM CAVE

– Greg Martin

The re-build of the infrastructure at the Waitomo Glowworm Cave is progressing well. It is a very complicated structure which is testing the patience of the contractors and it has produced many problems to be solved by the engineers and architects – mostly due to the complex curves in two planes for the canopy structure. The TVR (teflon pillow) material is to be placed over the substructure. The pillows will be permanently inflated by pneumatic pumps and the actual material is expected to be as clear as glass.

Underneath the canopy are three levels of buildings including two levels each of 100 seat restaurants and another cafe on the very top level. There are theatrettes and a production company has commenced shooting a film of local identities talking about the history and special stories of living in this place associated with the caves, etc. That will be shown to visitors in one of the theatrettes.

The expectation was that the building would be substantially complete and ready for a 'soft' opening in March 2010. My view is that it is much more likely to be May 2010. The building will be opened in stages in terms of becoming functional. I would imagine that the ticket sales area and offices will be accommodated, the restaurants will be progressively staffed, the cafe and retail will be staffed and established and this will all take place progressively over 3–4 months. When it is all fully functional, there will be a formal opening by the Prime Minister, John Key, and at this stage that is likely to be in November/December 2010.

I can not be any more certain about this as one of the complications with the construction contract is that Tourism Holdings Ltd (the operator) have agreed with Hawkins Construction (the contractor) that they can take longer to complete the works if it does not add further costs to the project. In other words there is no penalty for not meeting the construction contract deadline. There is a broad deadline, but not one that will see an early completion.

In summary, there will be an informal opening late March to May (my best guess) to start to get the complex functional, landscaped, etc, and then an official formal opening towards the end of the year (probably November/December).



A further view – Waitomo Glowworm Cave Visitor's Centre construction.