

Local SES members rigging Mitchell Cave for visiting guides. Mitchell was the first cave in Australia in which fossils were found, and established Wellington as a pre-eminent palaeontology site.



13TH CAVE AND KARST PRESENTERS CONFERENCE

Wellington Caves, New South Wales and a FLYING VISIT to JENOLAN CAVES

– Kent Henderson

It is some years since I rocked up to a Cave Guides Gathering; my last attendance was at 10th such event at Mole Creek in 2004 – which conveniently preceded the 2004 ACKMA Annual General Meeting Weekend (the only time, thus far, this convergence has occurred).

The history of the biennial Cave and Karst Presenter's Conferences (as they are now called) was covered in a previous article in this Journal, so I will not iterate here – accept to repeat the closing paragraph of that article, the thrust of which remains true to this day:

What can be said is that the Guides Gabfests over years have greatly contributed to the knowledge, experience and professionalism of cave guides across the country, not to mention the networking they have engendered. They remain a most important part of the Cave and Karst management scene in Australia. (Henderson, Kent. A Brief History of the Cave Guides Gabfest. ACKMA Journal No. 70 – March 2008).

Certainly, the 13th Cave Guides Conference at Wellington Caves (25-28 July 2010) was no exception. About 35 attended, including various presenters – down a bit on past conferences. The Wellington event, I suspect, suffered a bit of a 'Mulu Hangover'... A substantial number of guides attended the ACKMA AGM 'Week' at Mulu back in April, obviously at some expense. While some

guides do get 'funded', a significant number 'self-fund' to these Guides events. Clearly, for not-a-few, the cupboard was somewhat bare this year. Such is life. However, we certainly had quality, if not quantity, with guides attending from Jenolan, Wombeyan, Buchan, Yarrangobilly, Kelly Hill, Margaret River, Mole Creek and of course, Wellington.

Attendees dribbled in on Sunday afternoon, 25 July, to be warmly welcomed by Wellington Caves Manager, Chris George, and his staff. A pleasant barbeque followed that evening, and included an 'Official Welcome' from the Deputy Mayor of Wellington Shire Council (which manages the caves), Dr. Mike Augée. Mike is an ACKMA member of many years standing, and a noted palaeontologist. He 'retired' to Wellington Caves a few years ago (as you would) – his house is a stone's throw from the caves car park!

The next morning, after breakfast in the caves kiosk, we assembled in the 'Caves Recreation Room' for a further welcome from Mike Augée (who chaired the day's session), and the first of many presentations. First up, at 9am, was Jenolan Guide Ted Matthews with an interesting Powerpoint presentation on *Karst Geology*, after which he promptly handed out a CD ROM of his talk to all present.

He was followed by local resident and soil conservationist John Lawrie, who spoke on the

topic of *Soils in Karst Environments*. It was a topic I have rarely heard addressed, so much of what he said was 'virgin information' (at least to me) – well put across too. The next presentation was particularly good – *Cave Hydrology*, by Professor Andy Baker of the University of New South Wales. Andy is a POM who relatively-recently immigrated to Sydney to take up the Chair of the Water Research Laboratory, within the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

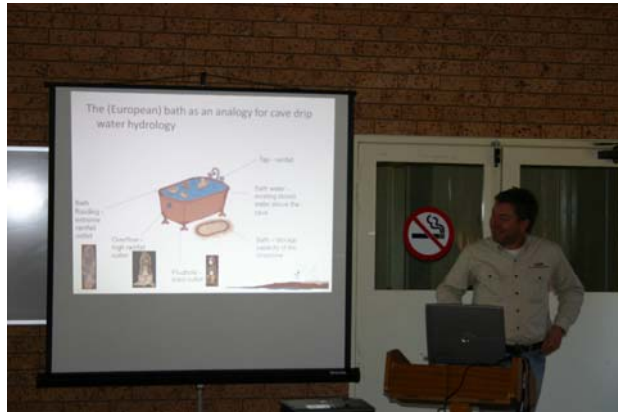
See: <<http://www.wrl.unsw.edu.au/site/>>.

Andy and his students are doing considerable research at Wellington Caves, as part of his faculty's *Connected Waters Initiative*, particularly in measuring drip water.

See:

<<http://www.connectedwaters.unsw.edu.au/news/wellingtoncavesnaturallaboratories.html>>.

Andy has foreshadowed an article in the December ACKMA Journal, and he hopes to attend the 19th ACKMA Conference in Ulverstone next May.



Professor Andy Baker talks hydrology.

After morning tea, we were favoured with a further four presentations prior to lunch. First up was Dr. Anne Musser, whose talk on *Marine Palaeontology* was most interesting. Anne is a part time guide at Jenolan, and is also connected with the Australian Museum. Next up was Ian Eddison, a long-term and virtuoso guide from Jenolan. He gave us the first of three 15 minute sessions entitled 'Interpretation in Brief', which he presented over the three days of the Conference. They were very good indeed.

Dr. Mike Augée was next up, and spent his half hour slot talking about the *History of Palaeontology at Wellington Caves*. Excellent, as expected! The final presentation for the session was Sasa Kennedy from Jenolan, who spoke on the various children and Teenager tours developed and used at Jenolan Caves, including 'Bats, Bugs and Beasties', 'Junior Guides' and 'Junior Explorers'. This again highlighted to me the wonderful innovation and high guiding standards at Jenolan, which these days, in my view, are second to none.

After lunch, Andy Baker gave a brief demonstration of his drip metres, where upon we hopped onto a mini bus for local countryside tour. We visited a local lookout, arboretum, and a pub in the historic hamlet of Stuart Town. Yes, well... It was a pleasant enough afternoon, but not a lump of limestone was to be seen anywhere. I think the afternoon could have been much better spent – a tour of the recently-developed (by Dr. Mike Augée) *Fossil Trail* at Wellington Caves, for example. While attendees were told about it – it was not included in the program, regrettably.

The evening saw other pleasant dinner, as well as Bush Poetry Recitals by local raconteur Colin Poyner – which were enjoyed by all. I must comment, at this stage about the superb organisation of the event. The quality (and sadly, the quantity...) of the food (effectively five meals a day!) was exceptional, not to mention the incredible hospitality of Wellington staff. The two large 'roaring' open fires outside the Rec Hall each night were wonderful and a great magnet, given the chilly night air!

Day Two, Tuesday 27 July, saw another set of presentations in the morning. Ian Eddison commenced with more reflections on interpretation, followed by local physiotherapist Christine Wood talking on *Physiotherapy and Injury Awareness* – very useful. Kier Vaughan-Taylor and Greg Ryan, the well-known Sydney cave divers, travelled to the Conference to present an excellent paper on Limekiln and Mc Cavity Caves – the latter being a large water-filled cavern at Wellington.

After morning tea, we were favoured with a talk by Fiona Ferguson on *The Age of Fishes Museum* at Canowindra in Central New South Wales – of which I had never heard. It seems quite outstanding. This year it won the NSW Inland Tourism Awards, I'm told! See: <<http://www.ageoffishes.org.au/>>. Jenolan Guide Scott Melton topped off the morning with a talk and exposition of his extensive collection of cave memorabilia.



Jodie Rutledge (left) and Monica Yeung at a display concerning The Age of Fishes Museum at Canowindra.

After lunch, it was time to tour Wellington Caves – in their fullest splendour. Kier Vaughan-Taylor and

Greg Ryan had rigged and led a caving trip into Limekiln-Mc Cavity Caves, while the local SES had rigged Mitchell Cave with ladders, cave ladders, belays, etc, etc... SES members were everywhere! I have never done an 'easier' wild cave... Of course, many visited the two Wellington show caves – Cathedral and Gaden – over the course of the afternoon, together with touring the fabulous Phosphate Mine. Nothing has changed at Wellington. Gaden Cave, and particularly Cathedral Cave are desperate for re-lighting, but the Wellington Shire Council is 'poor and penniless'. Sigh... We live in hope.



Dr. Anne Musser exploring the palaeontological delights of Mitchell Cave.

And so to the final day of this three day guides extravaganza! The morning opened with Ian Eddison presenting the final of his three-part 'Interpretation in Brief'. Barry Richard followed with an exposition on caving torches, and then Anita Eddison talked on the topic of Guiding Young Children, which was most useful. Haydn Stedman of Mole Creek Caves then presented an attractive Powerpoint of his cave system.

After morning tea, Jenolan's Russell Brown gave a talk on his visit to the wonderful Postojna and Skocjan Caves in Slovenia. We were then in for a special treat, Dave Head of Weidmuller and Dave Rowling of Jenolan gave a talk on cave lighting at Jenolan, whence they led us all to Water (Anticline) Cave in the middle of the Wellington Caves Caravan Park. The collapsed doline entrance of this cave was covered over years ago when the caravan park was

first developed, and re-opened in June 1988 by Ernst Holland and Dr. Armstrong Osborne et al (See ACKMA Journal No. 2. December 1988).

In later years the entrance doline was stabilised through various working bees, mostly of cavers. The aim is to light the entrance area (which sumps as a small lake just inside) and open it as a 'self guided experience'. But again, lack of money is the issue. The cave entrance contains just about the best example of an anticline you'd see anywhere.

So, Dave Head and Dave Rowling temporarily lit the entrance area of the cave in LEDs, just for the Guides Conference. Wonderful stuff! What can be achieved now with LEDs is quite wondrous.

After lunch, it was time for the final session of the Conference. Phil McGuinn gave us a pleasant Powerpoint slide show on Buchan Caves. Sarah Davies and Jen Stevens, guides all the way from *Caveworks* at Margaret River in Western Australia, presented on the fabulous Jewel Cave Redevelopment (which is well in progress) and the serious hydrology issues in Lake Cave.

After afternoon tea, the Conference wound up with the final presentation, from Lawrie Dunn on Wombeyan Caves. A brief discussion followed, and it was decided that the 14th Cave and Karst Presenters Conference would be held at Buchan Caves, Victoria, in 2012 – at dates to be advised.

So, a wonderful three days came to an end. It is impossible to conclude without thanking those many people who contributed to its success. First there is the Wellington Caves staff – Chris George, Debbie Mara, Denis Bell, Col Birchall, Jeannie Littlewood and Christine Robinson – all who contributed much, both before and during! Then there were our fabulous cooks Carol Birchall and Loraine O'Rourke, who constantly provided meals of incredible quality and (sadly...) abundance! Needless to say, it was impossible to starve – but very easy to put on weight! Sigh...

Finally, there was Damien Elwell and his SES team, and Kier Vaughan-Taylor and Greg Ryan who facilitated our caving activities. A sincere thank you to them all.

For the record, the schedule of past cave guide events is as follows:

13 –14 May 1990	1st Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Yarrangobilly Caves, NSW.
3 – 5 March 1991	2nd Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Wombeyan Caves, NSW.
17 – 18 March 1992	3rd Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Naracoorte Caves, SA.
24 – 26 March 1993	4th Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Buchan Caves, Vic.
14 – 18 March 1994	5th Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Jenolan Caves, NSW.
4 – 8 March 1996	6th Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Kelly Hill Caves, Kangaroo Island, SA.
15 – 20 March 1998	7th Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Augusta/Margaret River Caves, WA.
28 Feb – 3 March 2000	8th Cave Guides <i>Gabfest</i> , Wombeyan Caves, NSW.
3 –8 Feb 2002	9th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop, Naracoorte Caves, SA
24 – 28 May 2004	10th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop, Mole Creek, Tas.
26 Feb – 3 March 2006	11th Cave & Karst Presenters Workshop, Augusta/Margaret River Caves, WA.
10 – 16 Feb 2008	12th Cave and Karst Presenters Conference, Jenolan Caves, NSW.
26 – 28 July 2010	13th Cave and Karst Presenters Conference, Wellington Caves, NSW.
2012 – dates TBA	14th Cave and Karst Presenters Conference, Buchan Caves, Victoria.

ONTO JENOLAN...



Caves House at Jenolan – which has recently received a complete external makeover, including a brand new roof.

Following the Wellington Guides Conference, I stayed one night at Jenolan with Barry and Robyn Richard, so I could see the new lighting in Orient Cave and in Ribbon Cave. Thus, first thing next morning, Barry and I met ACKMA Member Dave Rowling (Jenolan's electrician) at the entrance to the Binoomea Cut.

The first thing I noticed was that the passageway had been lit overhead with new LED 'tracklights'. Very interesting! Dave has arranged the fittings so they can, if wished, be lit up in sequence. This can be done from either end of the passage – thus, one can have the lights running away from you, or towards you. Quite a nifty effect.



The Lighting Control Box in Orient Cave, from which every LED in the cave can be controlled, and at which guides can custom their own tours.

Needless to say, Orient has been very well done. It still has a bit of sensory overkill, but that is now mostly the cave itself and its massive profusion of speleothems, rather than just its old 'in-your-face' lighting. Now gone is the feeling of being 'overwhelmed with light'. The arrays in all sections of the cave are now myriad. The guide has 'almost infinite' lighting possibilities. Indeed, guides can program a whole tour, or indeed a variety of tours, and control it with their CBus hand set as they go. Several guides have done so. Orient is now very

much in a new light (pun intended) and much which was not seen previously or highlighted before now is, or can be. Marvellous!

Running off the back of Orient is the delightful Ribbon Cave – a connoisseur's cave, as I call it. It is only shown a few times per week at most (unfortunately...), and it was not originally slated to be re-lit as part the Orient Cave make-over. However, with some dexterous accounting, it was able to be done. Unlike Orient, which as well as LED lighting also has stainless steel handrails throughout, the budget would only stretch to the lighting itself in Ribbon. Thus the old galvanized handrails are still *in situ* until the money can hopefully, eventually, be found to replace them.

As the power conduits run through the stainless steel railings in Orient, this needed to be continued in Ribbon. But with no stainless steel as yet, obviously the conduit has to remain presently visible. Not a top look, but one has to live with it for now. Of course, the LED lighting is first rate.

One thing Dave Rowling mentioned to Dave Head, in the lighting process, was the 'whiteness' of the LEDs. Dave Head worked on this, and can provide a range of 'softer' LEDs are various hues right back to the 'yellowness' of the old incandescent lighting, if desired. Thus Dave Rowling has used a range of these new LEDs in Ribbon Cave with excellent effect.



Dave Rowling in the area housing the Nettle Cave Commentary Handsets – soon to be available in 'Klingon'...

For those who haven't seen it, Ribbon is a 'narrow' passageway cave – with one entrance and no side passages. The speleothems in the cave, which are profuse, are very much 'up close and personal', and hence a fair amount of chicken wire is in the cave (a bit too much in my view...). This will become stainless steel chicken wire (as it now is in Orient) when the handrails are eventually replaced.

So, the two David's are now *hot to trot* working on re-lighting River Cave, which is budgeted and will be complete, at worst, by next March. It will, without doubt, be marvellous as well!

