



So! The **19th Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management** at Ulverstone, Tasmania, is upon us – just weeks away!! – from **SUNDAY 8 MAY 2011 to FRIDAY 13 MAY 2011**. A goodly (godly?!) number of international cave luminaries are attending, and I understand from Cathie Plowman and Tony Culberg that registration has been heavy! Wonderful stuff! It will be fabulous!! **IT IS NOT TOO LATE** to register – but you will need to act **quickly!!** Full Details and the Booking Form were inserted in the last two editions of this Journal....but if you've lost those (!) then they can be downloaded from the Member's Only Section of the ACKMA web Site. **SEE YOU THERE!!**

The recent devastating floods in Queensland did not inundate the homes of any ACKMA members in the Rockhampton area, I am advised – though our heart goes out to the thousands of other people who were not so lucky. The Central Queensland karst area, twenty kilometres north of Rockhampton, was also largely unaffected. It is, of course, fairly hard to flood tower karst – although caves within and below can be effected. Wet weather at Chillagoe not infrequently floods its show caves – Donna Cave in particular. On this occasion, thankfully, the floods were well south of Chillagoe.

Of course, any physical damage from a flood is one thing; economic damage is quite another. The floods occurred across the prime January tourist season – from that perspective alone they could not have come at worse time. As the Owner/Manager of Capricorn Caves in Central Queensland, ACKMA Fellow Ann Augusteyn, said to me in a recent email:

'For us and everyone the economic impact will be huge. There certainly are no tourists around. It would be more economical to close our doors at the moment but we are responsible for the livelihood of 15 staff, so we are open for business. Lots of cleaning and sorting going on at the moment! Unfortunately the Christmas/January trading is our busiest trading period which gets us through the anticipated quiet season to Easter...'

Of course, parts of Victoria and Tasmania also suffered floods, albeit not quite on the scale of Queensland. Gunns Plains Caves, near Ulverstone, was flooded on 14 January. Geoff Deer advised:

'Water got to the pump which is about 40% of the way from the path to the top of the steps (approx 5 metres). At 8.00am it was still 40-

50cm above the pathway as the photo below shows. We are waiting for it to go down below path; then clean up begins. I am not sure on electrics at this stage – I only know that the emergency pathway lights are working....'



Flooding in Gunns Plains Cave. Photo: Geoff Deer.

ACKMA member Deborah Hunter concurrently reported that flooding was severe in the Mole Creek area, with 'record level' flooding in Honeycomb Cave.

On 17 January the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service advised that the Marakoopa Cave in the Mole Creek Karst National Park had joined Gunns Plains Cave in being both closed until further notice due to flood damage. The Press Release also advised:

'The Westmoreland Falls Track near the Wet Cave Reserve has also been extensively damaged and is closed until further notice. Staff inspecting the area said that the track and bridges are all gone with the creek now a wide river. PWS acting Northern Region manager, Stan Matuszek, said the Marakoopa Cave sustained damage and the car park has also been affected by a landslide.'

'The heavy volume of water has also damaged the Fern Glade Track at Mole Creek and this is currently closed as well,' Mr Matuszek said.

'Fortunately King Solomons Cave at Mole Creek was not damaged by the deluge and is open for tours at the scheduled tour times.'

I was at Naracoorte for a few days in late January and, unsurprisingly, caught up with several local ACKMA identities. I stayed two nights at Deborah Carden's home (many thanks Deb!) and had a brief look around. I even went on a guided tour of Alexandra Cave (Frank, the guide in question, was truly excellent – as expected, of course!). I also had a walk through the self-guided Wet Cave. Its flooring near the entrance has been gouged a bit by local flooding back in December, although nothing too serious. Given all the recent rain, the tracking in many of the caves is wet in places, and the speleothems active (not a bad thing)!

But the floods aren't all doom and gloom... Whilst in Naracoorte I accompanied Steve Bourne to nearby Bool Lagoon. This RAMSAR-listed wetland is so often dry, but currently it is close to full. Life abounds! Particularly noticeable, aside from the

birds, are the *many, many thousands* of 'rare and endangered' frogs that have very rapidly bred in the wet. Wondrous stuff!

A bit of excellent news from Wellington Caves in New South Wales. Anticline (Water) Cave has now been (re)fenced and a viewing platform constructed therein. The set of steps constructed down into the cave and the lake is now open to the public. Well done, Wellington Caves Manager Chris George, and his staff! That said the eventual result was achieved over multiple weekends, over several years, through the physical efforts of volunteer cavers and local members of the *Friends of Wellington Caves* who hauled rocks and rubbish out of the cave and made it possible.

At bit about future ACKMA meetings.... At the upcoming 2011 Annual General Meeting at Ulverstone in Tasmania in May, the venues for the 2012 'Annual General Meeting Weekend', and the 2015 ACKMA Conference, will be determined.

With regards to next year's 'AGM Weekend' (2012), there two bids in thus far – one for Fitzroy Crossing in The Kimberley (with visits to Tunnel Creek, Windjana Gorge, etc, and perhaps the Bungle Bungles WHA); and the other for Wee Jasper in New South Wales. Details of these bids are elsewhere in this Journal, and they will also appear in the upcoming *19th Conference Handbook*. The decision will be made at the 2011 Annual General Meeting at Ulverstone.

As to which location should win the event; that is up to members! To my mind there are pros and cons with both proposals. The Kimberley, and its karst, is undoubtedly stunning, and Tunnel Creek is personally my favourite cave experience in Australia. ...and a very large number of members will not have been there either. Mimbi and its indigenous interpretation is wonderful! However, it isn't particularly cheap! – although as is pointed out in the submission, it would almost certainly cost more for members to visit individually... I suppose it depends on where you live too.

Wee Jasper, of course, is fabulous as well! Careys Cave, and Geoff Kell's interpretation, is fantastic – as is the surrounding karst and wild caves. On the downside, perhaps, is that a large number of members have been there. On the upside, the event will obviously be considerably cheaper for many members to attend than The Kimberley – and a very significant number of ACKMA members live in New South Wales, making Wee Jasper a not inconvenient venue for them.

It is usual that ACKMA sets its full conferences four years out to give each location plenty of time to get organized – ACKMA Conferences these days are no small affairs... Of course, Waitomo has the 2013 Conference; thus we need to determine the 2015 venue. While it is purely a matter for members to determine at the appropriate AGM, there is a long-established rota whereupon each State receives an ACKMA Conference 'in turn'. For our purposes, we count the North and South Island of New Zealand as 'states'. That gives us eight 'states', so each can expect a Conference once every sixteen years. There is obviously an equitable nature to this practice. After Waitomo,

by the rota, it is the 'turn' of New South Wales, followed by South Australia. In terms of NSW, there is a general consensus that it is Jenolan's 'turn'. That said, very happily, Jenolan will be hosting the 2014 ISCA Congress in November of that year, so it is a bit much to ask it hold the 2015 ACKMA Conference as well – only six months later!

As a result, I think members will find that the bid for our 2015 Conference will come from Naracoorte Caves. One would imagine that Jenolan would bid for the 2017 Conference in the fullness of time – in other words they would be effectively swapping their positions on the rota...

And finally, a bit of 'karst levity' from New Zealand (AAP, 17 January 2011)...

Can you eat Pancake Rocks?

Where is the town of Whitebait and do you get pancakes from Pancake Rocks? Apparently tourists to Westport on New Zealand's South Island are getting confused between what to eat and what to look at. The Pancake Rocks is a natural attraction formed from layer upon layer of water sculpted limestone, resembling stacks of pancakes.

Seal Colony Top 10 holiday Park owner Sue Walsh said she could write a book about the odd questions she had been asked by visitors. The little girl who skipped breakfast because she was going to eat pancakes from the Pancake Rocks was making an understandable assumption for a child. However, Mrs Walsh often had adults asking how far it was to the beach and if they needed to drive. They asked in daylight, looking out at the beach that was only about 100m away, she said.

Pancake Rocks' blowholes caused confusion – she was asked recently how they worked and if you had to put a coin in. A lot of people knew there were some special rocks but didn't know their name. Where were the 'rocks that spit stuff out', one person asked.

'We just laugh,' Ms Anderson said. Sometimes language barriers added to the comedy and confusion. A staff member had been about to send a tourist out to the cemetery when their accent made caves sound like graves. People often enquired about the 'shiny worms' when they meant glowworms.



A view of the Pancake Rocks, at Punakiki
– 16th ACKMA Conference, 2005.