

VISIONS OF MULU: 60 MILLION YEARS IN THE MAKING

Reviewed by Andy Spate



This is a spectacular book! One hundred and sixty one pages of images and text beautifully laid out and printed on excellent quality paper. A credit to Borsarmulu Park Management, the Sarawak Forestry Corporation and Natural History Publications (Borneo) - all of whose logos are found on the title page. The book starts with forewords from the Chief Minister of Sarawak and the Managing Director of Borsarmulu Park Management followed by a brief exposition of the World Heritage values of Gunung Mulu National Park, which concludes with the following paragraph:

It may be the most studied tropical karst in the World, but we've still a lot to learn: whilst this is not a text book to teach you about what we think we know, hopefully it will inspire you to think about just how much we still have to discover in this remarkable place called Mulu.

This book truly does inspire one! As stated, this is not a text book, but rather is a collection of splendid photographs with excellent informative captions. It has less than 60 pages with substantial text blocks which include some eight pages of geological and geographical background including discussion of karst processes and speleothem formation. This is nicely illustrated with maps and diagrams. The following 30 pages outlines the history of the exploration of the karst starting with the Royal Geographical Society's 1977-78 expedition including descriptions of the support provided by the local Penan and Berawan indigenous people. Much of this nicely sparse text includes quotations from the various expedition

reports. Most of the book's cave photographs are to be found in this section.

The remaining 150 or so pages are devoted to the fabulous flora and fauna of Gunung Mulu – the photographs are simply stunning in topic, colour, layout and captioning. For example, a photograph on pages 66-67 even makes a pile of bat guano a thing of beauty! Some 17 photographers provide the images with the bulk being taken by Ch'ien Lee. Brief biographies of some of the photographers are provided in the comprehensive acknowledgments at the end of the book. A small bibliography is also included. Scattered throughout the book are a number of apt aphorisms such as Aristotle's:

If one way be better than another, that you may be sure is Nature's way.

This is a magnificent 'coffee-table' book – without any hint of demeaning it by using that term. Anyone who has visited, or intends to visit Gunung Mulu will be delighted by this book. It retails for 160 Malaysian Ringgits – about \$A50 and \$NZ65. This is a very, very reasonable price for a hardcover book of this quality.

However, it weighs in at about 1.4 kg and thus postage from Malaysia will be about \$A25 (~\$NZ33). Brian and Sue will be bringing a box of 10 to Adelaide in July and will leave it with Steve on consignment – postage will still be of the order of \$11-16 in Australia and \$NZ35 across the Tasman ... so get in touch with Steve – or Brian at the Borsarmulu address above.

My one quibble with the book is that Brian and Sue do not get as much prominence as they clearly deserve.

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE 14TH INTERNATIONAL SYPOSIUM on VULCANOSPELEOLOGY, UNDARA, AUSTRALIA

Reviewed by Andy Spate

Kent asked me to review this DVD a few months ago for this edition of the ACKMA Journal.

Before moving onto the review I would like to pay tribute to the fantastic job that Kent has done for ACKMA in the evolution of the Journal – and of ACKMA itself. How often has he extended deadlines for me, made (sometimes trivial) changes to text at the last minute and treated my grumbles about symbols and layout cheerfully ...

The International Symposia on Vulcanospeleology are held under the auspices of the International Union of Speleology's Commission on Volcanic Caves under the chairmanship of Jan Paul Van Der Pas. The 14th Symposium was held at Undara in August 2010 with about 30 attendees.

The proceedings are contained on a DVD edited and produced by Greg Middleton and his group that organised the 14th International Symposium on Vulcanospeleology 2010. The DVD contains:

- a pdf document of the proceedings (216 pp.)
- separate pdf documents of 16 papers presented at the Symposium (I understand that at least 17 papers were submitted)
- a copy of the Proceedings in e-pub format (original layouts not preserved)
- 19 PowerPoint presentations used by presenters at the Symposium.

Inclusion of PowerPoint presentations **and** written papers is a useful approach to publishing conference proceedings that ACKMA might usefully adopt?

Surprisingly the table of contents is buried within the complete proceedings document following Peter Whitehead's scene-setting paper on the McBride Basalt Province and its vulcanospeleologic landforms.

I have not had the time to read all of the papers on the DVD but the variety and intellectual depth is obvious. These proceedings certainly add to our appreciation of lava field landforms in Australia and beyond.

Arni Stefansson's account of his community-based cave conservation and rehabilitation project is particularly well worth a look – what can be achieved with enthusiasm and hard work!

I had not previously heard of Kempe et al's use of the term 'pyroduct' for lava tubes so I did some googling and came up with the following:

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THE PREACHER VS THE VOLCANOLOGIST - ORIGIN OF THE WORD "PYRODUCT"

Titus Coan (1801-1882) was an influential Congregational missionary who made major

contributions to the establishment of Christianity in Hawaii. He was also a gifted geological observer and was fascinated by the volcanic activity he witnessed after his 1835 arrival in Hawaii.

James D. Dana (1813-1895), who had already made major contributions to mineralogy, was appointed at age 25 to be the Geologist on the US Exploring Expedition ("Wilkes Expedition" – 1838-1842). He visited Hawaii for a month in 1840, where he met Coan. Dana later became Chairman of the Geology Department at Yale University and Editor of the influential Silliman Journal – forerunner to the American Journal of Science. He has been rightfully called "America's First Volcanologist". Coan's letters to Dana about Hawaiian volcanic activity, published in the AJS, are the principal records of Hawaiian volcanic activity between 1840 and 1880.

His detailed observations of the 1843 Mauna Loa eruption are the earliest field descriptions of any eruption of that great volcano. After an arduous four day journey through dense forest above Hilo, he came to the advancing lava flow, and on the fifth day hiked up to the source vents high on Mauna Loa's Northeast Rift Zone. Along the way, he witnessed openings into fiery subterranean "rivers of fire" that were supplying molten lava to flow fronts far below. He correctly noted the heat-insulating properties of these shallow underground tunnels, compared them to aqueducts, and wrote: "If I might be allowed to coin a word, this pyroduct – filled with mineral fusion, and flowing under our feet at the rate of twenty miles an hour, was truly startling".

Coan's pyroduct description was published in 1844 in an obscure journal, and re-published by Dana in 1850. In 1852, however, he rebutted Coan's conclusions and declared that what Coan had witnessed were actually the tops of deep fissures that were cutting the flanks of Mauna Loa "a linear fissure or series of fissures, and not a single tunnel-like opening". Dana continued to deny the existence of pyroducts.

I am not sure I like the term, but science evolves ...

John Brush and Marj Coggan have told me that the highlight of the presentations was Kirsty and Martin Mills which was a sound and light show on Fingal's Cave on Staffa Island in the Hebrides. The composer Felix Mendelssohn visited Staffa in 1829 and developed a musical sketch into an overture titled 'The Lonely Island'. He later rewrote the piece and renamed it 'The Hebrides Overture' (Fingal's Cave) as his Opus 26. It is worth noting that Martin and Kirsty have amassed a collection of more than 200 historic images of Fingal's Cave – 23 of these are included in their presentation to the symposium.

The 14th Vulcanospeleology Symposium DVD is well worth obtaining and reading. Copies can be obtained from Greg Middleton at ozspeleo@iinert.net.au.