

FROM THE EDITOR



I hope that the holiday season has treated all show cave operators kindly and that everyone has had a successful period. I had worked nearly every Christmas holiday period since 1990 in the caves at Naracoorte and with a new job had no need to be there. So, how did I relax with this time off? I spent it caving and excavating fossil sites with partner Liz of course. A report of this work will come in the next journal.

It would seem that show caves are leading the way in the tourism industry in more than one state. Both Jenolan Caves and Augusta Margaret River Tourism Association for the Jewel Cave redevelopment have won their respective state tourism awards and will face off against each other at the Australian Tourism Awards, to be held in March in Cairns. It seems caves have it covered on both sides of Australia! I congratulate the teams at both sites and wish you the best of luck in March, may one of you win the top prize.

This journal features a report on the Piccaninnie Ponds deep diving project, one I was closely involved with while working with the Department for Environment and Heritage. It was a project that made me very nervous with the risks associated with diving over 100m deep through constrictions but also very excited with the information that the team was gathering. It was a very professionally run project and it is a real credit to all involved for the way they operated. Unfortunately, there has been another cave diving accident in Tank Cave in the South East of South Australia and the third fatality in a little over 12 months. After a long period without a fatality, 36 years or so, it is disappointing and distressing for all involved in the sport to lose friends and family in this manner.

The Cave Divers Association of Australia (CDAA) has responded by appointing a Safety Officer (Dr Richard Harris, co author of the Piccaninnie Ponds report and excellent cave diver) and an on line incident reporting system. The following is from the CDAA website.

Why incident reporting? Good risk management by the CDAA requires information from our members about incidents, accidents and even near misses. Most other cave diving associations worldwide collect information in

this way and the CDAA is overdue in doing the same. Hence, we are pleased to announce that any incidents can now be reported by completing an online form which can be found on the CDAA website.

At this time, we do not know how many of our members suffer decompression illness each year. How many rupture eardrums, get urinary infections from P valves, sprain ankles in lake chambers or even drop a tank on their toe? Information about all these accidents can help us devise preventative strategies, identify high-risk dive sites or better educate our members about risk. Accident analysis makes excellent teaching material in our courses but at this time we simply do not have the information we need.

By the way an incident does not need to cause harm in order to be an important learning tool. An incorrect gas switch that didn't cause any harm is a good example. Going past thirds because of a distraction or peer group pressure may not have caused an accident but we can learn from that mistake. A free flowing reg can be easily dealt with but might alert us to a manufacturing issue if reported by several divers. These are just some examples and hopefully you get the idea. We would rather receive too many reports that are not of interest, than miss one that might carry an important safety message.

Cave divers responded to cave diving deaths in the 1970s by introducing guidelines and regulating the sport internally and it is excellent to see the response to learn from mistakes and incidents and prevent further losses.

Peter Buzzacott, who attended the Margaret River ACKMA conference, has co-authored a paper of cave diving deaths which is available at www.cavedivers.com.au. It is a very interesting and sobering read.

Nic Haygarth's paper on the history of cave tourism in Tasmania presented at the ACKMA conference in Ulverstone, Tasmania in May 2011 has been published in this journal. Attention to detail is a feature of Nic's work as is his ability to find the stories behind the stories that make the history of cave tourism such a fascinating subject.

Dan Catchpoole continues his historical account of James McKeown and like Nic, delves deep into the literature to uncover the real story behind one of the interesting characters in Australian cave history.

Margaret River in Western Australia has again been ravaged by fire. Fortunately no lives were lost but once again a number of homes were claimed by the fires. Infrastructure associated with the show caves was all spared. Peter Wood reported that people were seen out searching for caves in the forest cleared by fire while the fires were still burning!

For those who missed purchasing the house in the cave on Ebay a couple of years back, it appears this amazing house in Festus is back on the market. The marketing includes;

"Plenty of room in our 17,000 square foot home. The front chamber houses the main part of the 3-bedroom finished house. The middle chamber holds the laundry room, storage, and a spare bath. The middle chamber made a great party room and is 80 feet by 80 feet. The back chamber still has the stage where Ted Nugent, Bob Seger, Ike and Tina Turner, the MC5 and many other bands performed. Energy efficiency: Geothermal and passive solar keep the home comfortable year-round without a furnace or air conditioning." A home for the true cave enthusiast!



House in a cave in Festus, United States

And from the website of National Geographic:

Hang Son Doong, or "mountain river cave," is in a remote part of central Vietnam. Hidden in rugged Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park near the border with Laos, the cave is part of a network of 150 or so caves, many still not surveyed, in the Annamite Mountains. This is very close to a well-known tourist cave that we will visit: Phong Nha Cave World Heritage Site in central Vietnam. National Geographic calls Hang Son Doong "the world's largest cave", which, although true in many senses, is a bit misleading. Hang Son Doong is the largest known cave passage, a huge and spectacular tube over a 100 m in diameter (at places even 200 x 150 m) and 4.5 km long. This passage is not continuously "underground", as the cave roof has collapsed in several places, creating large shafts open to the surface which allow jungle vegetation to grow on the cave floor. The largest cave room (by volume) remains the Sarawak Chamber in Deer Cave (Mulu, Sarawak, Malaysia) which is an unsupported natural chamber 700 m long x 400 m wide and over 70m high.

It seems the debate on the world's largest cave continues perhaps because people have different ways of defining cave passages and chambers or are not even sure of their facts. Sarawak Chamber and Deer Cave are a long way apart! Deer Cave, Sarawak Chamber and Hang Son Doong-all REALLY big. I am extremely grateful to Robbie Shone who has provided his fantastic image of Sarawak Chamber for printing in this journal. I had the privilege of visiting Sarawak Chamber and thanks to a David Head Weidmuller light could actually see most of the chamber. I zero chance of capturing an image like this and can only imagine the time it took to get everyone in place. Many thanks Robbie!

The Wee Jasper ACKMA weekend is approaching fast. Andy Spate, Geoff Kell and Suzanne Newnham, and Ian and Helen Cathles have a great weekend of activities planned. Wee Jasper is easily accessible from Canberra for those who need to fly in, and New South Wales has many other caves within easy reach. I hope to see many of you there and enjoy a few days together in the valley.

Coming Events	
2012: 14-18 March	International Symposium on Vulcanospeleology, Jordan
2012: April	Argentine Congress of Speleology, Mendoza, Argentina
2012: 4-6 May	ACKMA Annual General Meeting, Wee Jasper, New South Wales
2012: Aug 5-10	International Geological Congress, Brisbane
2012: September	12 th International Symposium on Pseudokarst, Galicia, Spain
2012: 6-15 Sept	World Conservation Conference. Jeju Island, South Korea
2012 13-15 September	International Congress of Scientific Research in Show Caves, Scocjan Caves, Slovenia
2012: November	International Show Caves Association Conference Greece/Turkey
2013: 6-11 Jan	Australian Speleological Federation, 29th Biennial Conference, Galong, NSW, Australia
2013: 12-18 May	ACKMA 20th Conference, Waitomo Caves, New Zealand