

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Peter Chandler

Often there seems to be so much going on it's hard to keep up! My wife would probably say it is mostly self inflicted.

We are saddened to hear of the premature death of Peter Berril. We look forward to reading more about Peter.

Here at Waitomo and Tourism Holdings Operation, both Robert Tahiri and Van Watson have been made redundant from their positions in restructuring moves. Van is finishing up on 31 March and Robert is taking a position with the Company as the head of the maintenance department (including Travis Cross). I can't help feeling that the loss of human capital from such an organisation's daily operations is a retrograde step. Only recently an academic discussed on NZ National Radio the importance of networks and business connections, and in this business age efficiency and profitability were ultimately more important than turnover. There is of course the triple bottom line.

We look forward to re-visiting Wee Jasper and enjoying the company of the local members and others, and seeing many of you there. We also trust that the headwaters of the Murrumbidgee have receded and the water supply via the Murray River to South Australia is ample!

Being resident in the temperate climate of Waitomo and annually our Spellbound tours having the Month of June off. It's a long time since there was a June ACKMA AGM! And from Auckland there are many flights to various Pacific islands.

A TRIP TO NIUE

Libby and I saw some accommodation and flight specials, this time last year, but by the time we had decided that the island of Niue would be a great place for a one week long escape, the specials were gone, we booked anyway! There are, of course, lots of holiday tips on line, we knew we could expect few tourists, lots of caves and coastal karst, and coconuts - Niue means "behold the coconut!"

Niue was charted and named the Savage Islands by Captain James Cook in 1774, as three times the Niueans did not let him land. It is one of the world's largest coral atolls, at 260 square kilometres and approximately 2400 kilometres northeast of New Zealand.

Niue is remote and its Polynesian people are culturally and linguistically different; between Tonga to the West and the neighbouring Cook Islands to the South East. It is separately administered by New Zealand as a free association territory of New Zealand since 1901.

The local economy suffers from the typical small Pacific island problems of geographic isolation, very limited natural resources, and a small, decreasing population. In fact, the population of Niue continues to drop (*from a peak of 5,200 in 1966 to about 1300 in 2011*), with



Access to Tomo Chasm

substantial on-going emigration to New Zealand. Niueans can hold NZ passports and there are weekly flights.

An essay on Niuean issues and its future by Dr J Floor Anthoni can be viewed at www.seafriends.org.nz/niue/future.htm



The craggy limestone outcrops of Niue.

Our luggage was dominated by two bicycles, not that we planned a cycle tour, snorkel gear and lights. Most other passengers' luggage was bags filled with foodstuffs.

Things got off to a bad start at Auckland airport when Libby's suntan lotion was confiscated. On arrival after checking out rental cars, we ended up with a small Toyota with a rattly boot and a broken door handle. This made trips to the numerous coastal karst features very easy. Not really caves, as daylight was always somewhere, though they gave the feeling that there were caves somewhere. The sharp and angular coral in the rainforest meant that without local knowledge navigation was pretty much impossible.

A guided cave tour was advertised, but not actually available! We hadn't figured this out till Sunday and Saturday was the cave tour day. Of course we were enthusiastic to participate/ visit Tali's cave tour, and thanks to Pauline Rex at the information centre, we got to do this with Tali's grandson, who was granted permission to take time off school! Like many Niueans, Tali lives in New Zealand and his son operates a garage in Niue.

The adventure cave tour, a through trip, was profusely decorated with notable black deposit on much of the

cave's interior. An aluminium ladder had replaced the discarded wooden one. The guide was a lad of few words, he opened up a lot on the return walk, he had great knowledge of local plants. Drinking fizzy coconut milk out of a green coconut back at the van - an acquired taste - was a nice touch.

When we got home we found out there have been articles about Niue published, including in the New Zealand Speleological Bulletin. Paul Williams and Peter Crossley were there in 1985! There are extensions to some of the caves we did visit.

The idea of a post conference tour to Niue had some appeal, but was put in the too hard category, though we would like to return soon! We can thoroughly recommend it for anyone who wishes to extend their trip after the Waitomo conference in 2013.



Taval arches