

WEE JASPER (and YARRANGOBILLY) ACKMA AGM WEEKEND

Steve Bourne

The Annual General Meeting of ACKMA was held at Wee Jasper on Saturday 5 May 2012. Most members started gathering on the Friday afternoon at the Cooradigbee Shearers' Quarters on the banks on the Burrinjuck Dam. Andy Spate, Suzanne Newnham and Geoff Kell had done a tremendous job in attracting over 50 members and an even better job of gathering them together. Over the years of ACKMA events I have noted this group is not the easiest to coordinate!!

The Friday night was the usual catching up with friends and meeting members who were at their first ACKMA event. Those from the northern climes, particularly Lana Little and Brian Clark, struggled with the sub zero evening temperatures, although the Kiwis and Tasmanians revelled in the conditions. The New Zealand contingent was particularly strong, with most enjoying an extended period "across the ditch".

The committee met on Saturday morning while other members enjoyed a Geoff Kell cave tour, apparently the abbreviated version as they were back in time for the AGM itself. Geoff has a well deserved reputation as a great cave guide and raconteur and did not disappoint with this morning's presentation. The International Show Cave Association (ISCA) conference in 2014 at Jenolan Caves must include a pre or post conference trip to Wee Jasper to show world cave managers how to really entertain visitors.

The AGM went through the standard fare, with only one election, that being for the Executive Officer position. Catherine Sellars retained her position with the only



Rillenkarren. Photo: Greg Martin

other change being Geoff Deer not renominating and John Brush taking the vacant committee position. Geoff has been coordinating the private cave owners and I hope he continues to undertake this role and feed information into the committee (and journal). The full list of office bearers appears on the inside front cover. After any years of no elections in ACKMA, I think that makes it three years out of four with elections.

The journal costs have been greatly reduced as we no longer pay for the layout. I appreciate everyone's patience in waiting for journals that have not been out on time, and forgiveness for occasional errors, which are mine and not the two excellent proof readers I have;



ACKMA AGM 2012. Photo: Greg Martin

Tony Culberg and Andy Spate. Articles for the journal have been excellent in my first 12 months as Publication Officer, albeit a little slow in coming in. Again, I encourage everyone to write about what they are doing and where they have been in caving. The committee foreshadowed a possible reduction in membership fees in line with reduced journal costs – how many associations do you belong to where fees may go down??!!

Cathie Plowman, David Wools-Cobb and Mary Traves have provided reports on Careys Cave with Geoff Kell, and wild caving trips of the weekend that appear elsewhere in this journal.

Andy Spate arranged an excellent series of speakers for the Saturday evening. The talks were held in the wonderfully restored Cooradigbee Homestead.

Doug Mills from the New South Wales Parks Service gave a talk on his bat research at Wee Jasper and Bungonia. This particularly interested me, as I had brought Doug to Naracoorte a couple of years ago to advise us on bat



*Gavin Young presenting in Cooradigbee Homestead.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

counting methods. Doug has really led the way with Thermal Tracker technology in Australia and has been a great resource for Fulbright scholar Kristen Lear (see ACKMA Journal 86).

Gavin Young presented the Wee Jasper fossil fish story and what a story it is! Of Australian fossil fish sites, Gogo has received much more media attention, but the level of scientific endeavour, quality and quantity of the resource, and the information available to science, makes Wee Jasper one of the best fossil fish sites in Australia. Although I prefer my fossils to be younger marsupials that I can readily identify, I really enjoyed Gavin's presentation. One wonders what needs to be done to have this site recognised with National Heritage listing - it is surely one of Australia's most important fossil sites.

*Top and Middle. Rigging the tyrolean in Punchbowl Cave.
Photos: Lily Petrovic
Bottom. Andy Spate leading his karst walk with Pete and
Libby Chandler, and Dan Cove.
Photo: Miles Pierce*



*Everyone has a first ever caving experience. Al Warild (left) shares his with John Ash. Anemone Cave, a humble beginning for a caver who has been over 2km deep.
Photo: Celina Yapp*

Gavin's talk was followed by a (very) brief presentation by Tim Sendon. Tim has done amazing work with Gavin, creating replicas of Wee Jasper fish fossils using scanning technology and a 3D printer. The software he uses with Gavin is extraordinary, enabling you to 'fly' through a fish eyeball or any other fossil they have scanned. Awesome stuff!

The final talk was by Fred Ford on his work examining Holocene fossil cave deposits in eastern Australia, and examining what they can tell us Australia's fauna prior to European settlement. Some elements of Fred's work complement the work Liz Reed presented in ACMKA journal 86.

Saturday evening saw the usual frivolity and an auction to raise funds for the Wee Jasper school. Brian Clark had a number of his excellent Mulu books which raised a good sum and Geoff Kell offered a number of 'exclusive' Wee Jasper books, signed by the three authors. I paid \$40 for a copy (retail at \$15) and discovered I already had an 'exclusive' signed copy at home!! It was for an excellent cause though. The auction raised over \$1000 which is again an excellent contribution by ACKMA to a local community.

On Sunday, I participated in the Wee Jasper fossil tour. This is offered to visitors by Ian Cathles, and his

knowledge and presentation of the fossil site is first class. I really enjoy seeing someone presenting their own site, not as a trained scientist, but as a passionate person who lives on and cares for the site, and has spent a lifetime working alongside scientists to understand his land. Ian is on his farm daily and always discovering new fossils. I note similarities with Dave Elliott, a farmer in outback Queensland, who has discovered numerous dinosaur fossils and has established the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum.



Ian Cathles leading the fossil tour. Photo: Greg Martin

All too soon, we had to pack up, bid farewell, with a small group of us heading to Yarrangobilly Caves. There we spent Sunday afternoon with Manager George Bradford who showed us through the Caves House renovations. George has previously renovated the single storey building (which our group stayed in) and is currently working on the two storey building. It's a great project and I hope George will report on it in a future edition of the journal.

In the late afternoon and early evening, we visited North and South Glory Caves. The new stainless steel infrastructure and lighting in South Glory is first class. There are plans to upgrade interpretation in this self-guided cave.

On Monday morning, a few of our group headed off to Castle Cave, while others inspected the septic system - ACKMA members have diverse interests! We then toured Jillabanan and Jersey Caves, both of which are exquisitely decorated. I photographed some small straws above the tourist path in Jersey Cave and was surprised at the amount of hair/clothing fibre attached to, and embedded in, these straws. The front cover shows this in detail. A more detailed report of Yarrangobilly will appear in the next journal.

All too soon, it was time to leave and drive the 1200 km home, once again catching the red light at roadworks in the middle of the Hay Plains. Another superb ACKMA event was over.