

FROM THE EDITOR

The ACKMA Waitomo conference looms ever closer! Full details for the conference are included in this journal including an update from the organisers. Even though the conference is to be held off peak tourism season, Waitomo is a very busy site so its best to book early. I also encourage you to prepare a paper and share the work you are doing at your site.

In this journal, we once again have a variety of articles. Alessio Fabbriatore, Director of Grotte Gigante, Italy, has provided a report on the Congress held in September in Slovenia, at one of my favorite cave sites, Skocjanske Jama. I was particularly interested in the work of Prof Heros Lobo on the impacts of visitors to show caves. Some of his work, Projection of tourist scenarios onto fragility maps: Framework for determination of provisional carrying capacity in a Brazilian show cave has been published recently in Tourism Management. Copyright restrictions prevent publication in this journal, but it is available on line or contact me for a copy. Prof Lobo has indicated he will publish another study with his colleagues in the ACKMA journal.

The balance between preserving the cave environment and the need for a site to generate revenue is challenge for all managers. I know first hand the pressure during the busy times to put just a few more visitors on each tour to cater for large numbers: more pressure on the guide and the cave environment. In Australia, it appears most state governments are reducing budgets in the environmental sector and looking for more ways to generate revenue to offset budget cuts. The point that seems to be continually missed is that national parks and tourism do have a mutualistic relationship, but that does not mean their operations can generate a

financial profit. ACKMA life member Brian Clark and I have discussed this often and Brian puts it very succinctly; commercial activities in parks should be seen as partial cost recovery strategies rather than profit makers.

The privatisation of Jenolan Caves is once again in the New South Wales (NSW) government's thinking, as shown in these newspaper clippings. It must be tough times for Dan Cove and the Jenolan crew, when Ministers make statements like "the precinct had the potential to be a premier tourist attraction, but it had **"failed to flourish."**(emphasis mine- editor).

Jenolan Caves has been enormously successful in the NSW and Australian Tourism Awards, winning the Australian Tourism Awards for the Best Tourist Attraction in 2011. At the 2012 NSW awards celebrated in November, Jenolan Caves was awarded a silver award in the Tourist Attraction category for *The Magic of Jenolan*, a gold award in the Ecotourism category for *Jenolan Caves - Ancient Underworld*, and a gold award in the Heritage and Cultural Tourism category for *Jenolan Caves - Written in Stone*.



Fresh plans to turn Jenolan Caves into a private-sector gold mine

Sean Nicholls
STATE POLITICAL EDITOR

NSW taxpayers have pumped \$11 million into the historic but loss-making Jenolan Caves over the past nine years. Now the caves will be opened up for privatisation by the state government.

The Environment Minister, Robyn Parker, said the precinct had the potential to be one of the state's premier tourist attractions, but it had "failed to flourish", and had been receiving subsidies of up to \$700,000 a year.

While about 226,000 people visit the caves every year, only 10,000 stay overnight at the historic Caves House hotel.



Light at the end of the tunnel... the state government hopes to privatise Jenolan Caves.

"There is no reason Jenolan can't be more successful and stand on its own two feet," Ms Parker said.

"We now want the private sector operators to start thinking about how they can help this wonderful state asset realise its full potential."

The former Labor government announced similar plans in 2010, but they did not go ahead.

Ms Parker said the previous attempt showed that a private sector operator of Caves House needed the right to manage cave tours for it to be financially viable.

She said proposals would be sought early next year to take over management of the caves, including from business, local government, charities, individuals and the not-for-profit sector.

They would be offered a long-term lease on the hotel and another 30 buildings on the site, as well as access to the caves.

When Labor announced its plans in 2010, it was accused by the Nationals leader, Andrew Stoner, of "being sneaky" and "trying to flog off this Australian icon on the quiet".

Mr Stoner, who is the Deputy Premier, said at the time: "This news will not be welcomed by people living in the central west who depend on Jenolan Caves for employment and business."

A spokesman for Ms Parker said Labor had "proved time and time again" it was incapable of working with the private sector.

"The community had no confidence in the former government - as was evident at the election," he said.

"We are being open and honest about our plans to give this fantastic destination the best chance of a bright future."

It is understood Jenolan Caves staff were briefed on the proposal on Wednesday.

Ms Parker said the government would negotiate with any private operator to protect jobs at the site.

"The staff are one of the major assets," she said.

"They live in the area, they love it and they understand its unique qualities."

Clippings from the Sydney Morning Herald announcing plans to privatise Jenolan Caves.

This is a very mixed message. The substantial investment into Jenolan Caves has been rewarded with the reinvigoration of Australia's premier cave attraction, leading the way with lighting and the diversification of tours creating a wealth of visitor experiences. The letter below published in response to the plans may voice the concerns of many.

So one more item of our precious heritage is to be privatised and added to O'Farrell inc ("Fresh plans to turn Jenolan Caves into a private sector gold mine", December 6). How much more of NSW can this man sell off before we are environmentally bankrupt?

Jenolan Caves is part of a world heritage national park and is unique in being the oldest open caves system in the world. When it was gazetted as a public reserve in the 1800s it was Australia's first protected environmental area. Jenolan Caves is a very special place to Australians and all O'Farrell can see are dollars and cents. How long before all of our national parks are sold to the highest bidder or completely alienated either by shooters, cattle-men or business interests?

Some cave systems operate very successfully in the private sector. Princess Margaret Rose Caves in Victoria and Gunns Plains Caves in Tasmania are two under private operation, but still have government investment for major infrastructure upgrades. A good topic for discussion at the Waitomo conference with its theme of "The Triple Bottom Line."

This journal has a contribution from Dr Anne Musser, who works at Jenolan Caves as a guide. Anne is a palaeontologist by training and spent many years researching the Riversleigh fossil site. Anne presented a

paper at the Buchan Caves guides conference on a palaeontological tour of Jenolan caves and presents her ideas here. It shows the opportunities that are available in caves to tell many different stories using the same cave or caves.



Anne Musser speaking at the Buchan Caves guide conference

Greg Middleton's contribution to caves on Rodrigues has been recognised in a ceremony held at Francois Leguat on the island. I have seen first hand Greg's work and the high regard the locals have for him and this recognition is thoroughly deserved.



Greg Middleton (right) at a dinner in 2006 on Rodrigues held at the launch of a book by Julian Hume. Owen Griffiths, founder of the Francois Leguat Reserve in which Grande Caverne and other caves are located, is second from left.

Rolan Eberhard provides a critique on the value of artificial caves, following a visit to Lascaux II in France. David Summers, President of the International Show Caves Association (ISCA) provided his address from the recent ISCA conference and Dan Cove a short report plus an interesting image.

Deborah Carden has a holiday with a difference, involving herself in a cave rescue of Derek Lipyeat on a trip home to New Zealand. I am sure there are some lessons to be learnt from this, but I for one hope I can still get underground of my own free will when I am 83! Deborah also provides an update of current happenings at Naracoorte. I met Derek briefly at the 2005 ACKMA conference at Westport and remember his carbide lamp with the largest flame you have ever seen.



Top. Moira and Derek Lipyeat in a cave.
Bottom. Derek rests after the rescue. Photos: Sourced from NZ news website.
Right. Southern Bentwing Bat. Photo: Steve Bourne.

Andy Spate has reviewed two books and has also circulated others through the email list. I appreciate any reviews of books that members purchase and am happy to publish reviews such as what Andy ahas provided.

Andy Spate has also provided the following:

Those ACKMA people who attended the AGM in Wee Jasper last May contributed about \$1600 to the Wee Jasper Primary School as a result of the auction I conducted and with Ian Cathles donating his fossil tour fees to the school!!! These monies were used to support whole of school excursions and equipment for the school.

I attended the Wee Jasper School Presentation Night on 13 December – an evening to remember as always! This year the 13 students – who all received a prize for their work through the year – provided the many parents and Wee Jasper community members with a few great hours of song and dance followed by a wonderful country dinner. Principal Mark Sullivan (who helped cook and serve our AGM dinner) specifically mentioned the fabulous support that the ACKMA AGM provided.

Your generous contributions were not wasted. Thank you.



*The Wee Jasper School presentation night.
Photo: Andy Spate*

Dr Lindy Lumsden has completed a Draft Recovery Plan for the Southern Bentwing Bat. This plan is of most relevance to the south east of South Australia and western Victoria where this species lives, but many of the actions proposed within the plan are relevant to all cave dwelling bats. If you would like a copy, please contact me.

