

MIDDLETON PLAQUED!

Steve Bourne

A few years back, I visited Mauritius and Rodrigues with Greg Middleton (see *ACKMA Journal* 74 March 2009 for an account of this trip). I keep in occasional contact with Greg, hoping maybe one day I can line up another trip with him. Greg travels to these two islands and “nearby” Madagascar regularly. He recently returned from another trip and gave me an update from Rodrigues.

One of the reasons Greg travels to Rodrigues regularly is to undertake maintenance on the lighting system he installed in Grande Caverne. Greg did a terrific job of the lighting of this cave using Weidmuller LED lights. On this occasion, he was part of a ceremonial plaque unveiling, which in part, recognises his contribution to the development of the cave.



*Top. Grande Caverne entrance. Photo: Steve Bourne
Bottom. Those responsible with the plaque (Manager Aurèle André is front centre). Photo: Arnaud Meunier.*

The plaque is in both English and French; the English version reads:

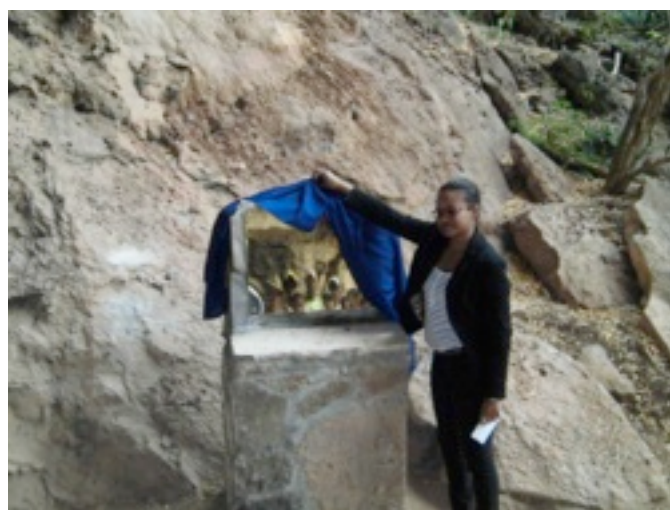
GRANDE CAVERNE

A great deal of careful planning, design and effort went into fitting out the 500 metres of Grande Caverne to make it possible for visitors to enjoy its beauty and grandeur in safety and relative comfort. This endeavour began in late 1990s with the bulk of the construction work being carried out between May and August 2007, directed by Mr Gregory Middleton, Cave Management Consultant from Tasmania, Australia. The project was the first of its kind to be undertaken in the Mascarenes and required the application of some special skills in unusual conditions.

Those who were involved in the pioneering construction works, apart from the staff of the Reserve, were:

AUGUSTIN Kioni
BEGUE Bruno
COLLET Jameson
MARTIN Raffendy
PIERRE-PRUDENCE Joseph Devi
LOUIS Ringo
PRUDENCE Sensonne
RAVINA Basil
RAVINA Jean Daniel
RAVINA Jean Paul
RAVINA Jorkenson
RAVINA J. Livingstone
SPEVILLE Jean Claude
WONG CHUNG Daniel

Unveiled by Ms Sandrine PIERRE, President (2012-13) of the Rotary Club of Rodrigues on 5th October 2012.



*Ms Sandrine Pierre does the honours.
Photo: Arnaud Meunier.*

Next day the local paper, *L'Express Rodrigues*, carried the attached piece. Greg has provided a rough translation.

TRANSLATION:

A plaque to acknowledge the contribution of local workers

Photo souvenir of those who have rehabilitated Grande Caverne.

The company, François Leguat Ltd., unveiled a plaque in recognition of workers who had worked on the fitting out of Grande Caverne at Anse Quitor. The ceremony took place on Friday, 5 October, at the entrance to Grande Caverne, at the Tortoise and Caves Reserve. Gregory Middleton, Cave Management Consultant, had deliberately travelled from Tasmania, an island near Australia, for the occasion.*

According to Aurèle Anquetil André, director of the reserve, this work began in 2007. "It's Mario Tolbize who put me in touch with Gregory Middleton.** Gregory then came and told us how to fit out the cave," he said. He had, he said, made a secure path over a distance of 500 metres and electrically lit it, among other work. "People do not believe it. However, we succeeded and future generations will see what their elders have been able to accomplish in just eight weeks," Aurèle André said with pride. In 2011, more than 20,000 people visited the cave. "It recognises the value of the people who have worked to make this place what it is today," he said, referring to the commemorative plaque. For Gregory Middleton, it is an honor to have been associated with this project. "Now I am obliged to return all the time, because I have fallen for Rodrigues. I hope everyone appreciates the true value of the fantastic work done by this team," he said with emotion.

Sandrine Pierre, president of the Rotary Club of Rodrigues for the year 2012-13, who also participated in the unveiling of the plaque says that the cave is not only a place of recreation for families, but also a means to educate the young about environment and ecology. "Promoting the ecological aspect of the island, to discover the flora and fauna are essential for the development and education of our children," she said.

Basile Ravina used his expertise in developing the cave. "Today I am proud that Gregory finds that we have done a good job. He trusted us. I can die tomorrow and future generations will see what I have done. My name is on this plaque," he said with pride and barely contained excitement. Five years have since passed. And will remain forever etched in the story of Rodrigues".

*This is inaccurate; Greg didn't know it was going to happen and had been in Madagascar.

**Another bit of journalistic licence; Greg didn't know him.

Une plaque pour saluer la contribution des ouvriers locaux



Photo souvenir de ceux qui ont réhabilité la Grande-Caverne.

La compagnie François Leguat Ltd a dévoilé une plaque commémorative en reconnaissance des ouvriers qui ont travaillé à l'aménagement de la Grande-Caverne, à Anse-Quitor-Coraïl. La cérémonie a eu lieu, le vendredi 5 octobre, à l'entrée de la Grande-Caverne, à la Réserve de Tortues et de grottes. Gregory Middleton, Cave Management Consultant, avait fait le déplacement de la Tasmanie, une île voisine de l'Australie, pour l'occasion.

Selon Aurèle Anquetil André, directeur de la réserve, ce travail a commencé en 2007. « C'est Mario Tolbize qui m'a mis en contact avec Gregory Middleton. Ensuite Gregory est venu et il nous a expliqué comment faire pour réhabiliter la caverne », a-t-il précisé. Il a fallu, dit-il, sécuriser le parcours sur une distance de 500 mètres et l'électrifier, entre autres. « Les gens n'y croyaient pas. Pourtant, nous avons réussi et les générations à venir verront ce que leurs aînés ont pu accomplir en huit semaines seulement », note Aurèle André avec fierté. En 2011, plus de 20 000 personnes ont visité la caverne. « C'est la reconnaissance de la valeur des personnes qui ont osé pour faire de ce lieu ce qu'il est aujourd'hui », a-t-il souligné en parlant de la plaque commémorative.

Pour Gregory Middleton, c'est un honneur d'avoir été associé à ce projet. « Maintenant je suis obligé de revenir tout le temps, car je suis tombé amoureux de Rodrigues. J'espère que tout le monde appréciera à sa juste valeur le travail fantastique effectué par cette équipe », a-t-il déclaré avec émotion.

Sandrine Pierre, la présidente du Rotary Club de Rodrigues pour l'année 2012-13, qui a aussi participé au dévoilement de la plaque, affirme que la caverne n'est pas seulement un lieu de récréation pour les familles, mais également un moyen d'éduquer les plus jeunes en matière d'environnement et d'écologie. « La promotion de l'aspect écologique de l'île, découvrir la faune et la flore sont primordiales pour le développement et l'éducation de nos enfants », a-t-elle souligné.

Basile Ravina a mis son savoir-faire au service de la caverne. « Zodi mo bien fier ki Gregory trouve ki nou finn bien travay. Li ti ena konfians en nou. Demain mo kapav mor me bann zenerasion fitir pou trouw ce ki moum fer. Mo non figir lor sa plak la », a dit ce dernier avec fierté et une émotion difficilement contenue. Depuis, cinq ans ont passé. Et cela restera à jamais gravé dans l'histoire de Rodrigues.