

FROM THE EDITOR

Not long after ACKMA members read this, we will meet in Waitomo. Our Conference Convener Libby Chandlers reports there are 70 or so registrations to date and I encourage any late comers to get their registrations in quickly. I will be staying on after the conference to do some promotional work with the South Australian Tourism Commission on behalf of the Limestone Coast region. It was very convenient that the conference and this 9 day trade show aligned so well, except I will need to leave Waitomo on Friday afternoon and will miss the final dinner. Dave Smith informed me the penalty for missing the dinner was the same fee as the dinner itself!

While at the Buchan Caves Caves Guides Conference, I spent some time speaking with Dennis Rebbechi. Dennis informed me he has every copy of the ACKMA Newsletter and Journal published (as I am sure a number of members do) and offered to provide me with copies of issues I don't have, mainly the early newsletters. It is interesting to look back at the early days as ACKMA established itself, the support ACKMA gave to protect important karst areas in Tasmania, news from each cave site reported in most editions, and how it grew from a newsletter to a journal, initially published twice each year. In June 1994, then President Andy Spate reported, *"it was decided at the recent Executive Meeting to continue, for the moment, with two major issues and two minor issues per year. The major issues will be retitled as the ACKMA Journal and will contain the Newsletter as pullout pages in the centre. We further decided that one, and only one article in each journal will be treated as a peer-refereed scientific paper. This creates extra work for authors and editors but will lift the acceptability of the Journal as a quality serial."*

That first journal was 40 pages long and this has largely remained the standard length since then, with some larger issues of up to 60 pages. As Publications Officer, I have been seeking to keep it to 40-44 pages, but with a lack of material forthcoming this may need to be reviewed. We can print colour covers each edition for minimal extra cost and the quality keeps improving with advances in printing technology. Full colour PDFs of the Journal are made available on line to members along with PDFs of individual articles. The electronic versions are very useful but I must admit to liking the bookshelf with an almost complete collection of ACKMA Journals. Should the Journal be available only on line or as a printed copy? I wonder how many read it on line prior to the arrival of the hard copy, which then just sits on the shelf.

In the Journal 89, *Mulu Mystery* sought responses to what might have created the unusual features in a Lagangs Cave in Gunung Mulu National Park. The photo unfortunately did not have a scale, due to access issues. Two responses were received.



*The unusual features in Lagangs Cave.
Photo: Brian Clark*

From **Jill Rowling:**

In an attempt to answer Brian Clark's challenging question, "How do swifts find enough dry limestone to make their saliva stick to the wall", I was interested to read on the Internet that since the Asian financial crisis apparently there has been a great increase in the numbers of disused farmhouses being converted to bird houses. People are raising swifts in these buildings in the hope that they can become rich by farming birds nests. This may well be a positive turning point in the preservation of the swift species.

Nevertheless there is Brian's question. I read about the complex substances which are produced by the male swift's saliva, and it occurred to me that, like our own saliva, it may very well stick underwater. I remember once stepping on a slug in bare feet and was amazed at how difficult it was to remove the sticky strands even with soap and water. Much easier to remove it once dried.

So I would suggest that the swifts do not need to look for a dry spot, just a spot with the right sort of roughness, and add a blob of saliva glue to start the nest. Once the structure is exposed to air, it should harden. The part attached to the cave wall probably remains fairly flexible yet strongly adherent.

This brings me to the other point Brian raised, which is "what processes could lead to dissolution like this" (depicted). The photo seems to be lit from below, meaning that the old nest positions are proud of the surface. Perhaps the nest saliva was protecting the limestone surface for a while, and all around was the normal process of tropical microorganisms eating away at the limestone.

And a couple of creative suggestions from **Van Watson**:

It is a well known supposition that the only real advantage of the ice age to Neolithic people was the abundance of ice cream. As a result, many 'cones' were mined from the relatively 'soft rock' of the Mulu Limestone. Due to high demand a 'Fast Lane' was established in Lagangs (Ice cream) Cave. To access the perfect cone rock, a four metre trestle was built out of not yet endangered rain forest. This has since decayed but the circular marks, where the cones were finally chipped away from the parent rock, remain, and to a trained observer, are self explanatory.

Swifts and Swiftlets vary slightly in their salivary glands. Swifts have the resin and Swiftlets the hardener. In the courtship ritual and nest building, components A & B are mixed like any 2 pot epoxy. People who remove the nests for study and elucidation are called 'crackpots' or Chinese Restaurateurs. Some people find all of this a bit hard to Swallow.

One item that has been missed in the past couple of journals is a list of upcoming events. I will endeavour to reinstate this and would be most appreciative of notification of relevant conferences, seminars and workshops.

One very large cave conference this year (aside from ACKMA in Waitomo!), is the International Congress of Speleology to be held in Brno, Czech Republic in July. The very impressive website for the conference shows 795 registrations from 51 countries, including 23 registrations from Australia and 3 from New Zealand. As much as I would love to attend, I won't get there, but look forward to receiving reports from the large Australian contingent. I was lucky enough to visit Brno and Moravian karst a couple of years ago and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. One site well worth seeking out is the Capuchin Crypt, where mummies of Capuchin monks are laid out. Maybe not what everyone wants to see, but fascinating nonetheless.

In this edition we have some remarkable images of Jenolan Caves in flood, along with a description of the deluge from Sasa Kennedy. At the same time as this was happening in New South Wales, South Australia's long run of hot dry weather was, and still is, continuing. We have had virtually no rain at Naracoorte for 5 months, although a few nearby places have scored some summer storms. While looking at the Jenolan images and the damage caused to infrastructure, it occurred to me that extreme weather events and their impacts on caves and karst would make an interesting little feature for the ACKMA Journal. Some are well known, such as the Cocklebidy Cave collapse when cavers were in the cave, but I am sure there are some more obscure historical events that could be published. I look forward in anticipation to receiving some images; before and after or

the normal conditions versus extreme conditions would be appreciated.

The events in Florida in early March when a bedroom in a house disappeared into a sinkhole illustrated the dangers of living on karst in some areas. It was desperately unlucky for the man who lost his life when the bedroom floor opened up. I watched the reporting of this by the media on line with great interest, especially the headlines generated and language used. "Man swallowed by giant sinkhole", "Man-eating sinkhole" and "Sinkhole devours man" are a small selection of headlines reporting the unfortunate incident. Not long after this, a golfer disappeared down a small sinkhole as well, but was luckier and survived. A google search of Florida sinkhole brings up many images of fabulous karst features. I am glad our south east of South Australia is somewhat more stable than Florida.

Tim Moulds, and Jay and Ross Anderson provide the first part of their two part report on their biological survey of the caves of Gunung Mulu World Heritage Area. This introduction to their survey will be followed by a results report after this has been presented to park management. This paper includes spectacular images by Ross Anderson.

In ACKMA Journal 86, Liz Reed's paper *Of mice and megafauna: new insights into Naracoorte's fossil deposits* reported on her work in Blanche Cave, Naracoorte. Liz and I have followed this up with a comprehensive look at the early days of Blanche Cave and the interpretation of the cave's fossils and compare this to what we know now with the benefit of more research and modern technology. This led us on a worldwide hunt via the internet of historical material and a trip to the Mary McKillop Centre to access their library. Much has previously been written about Father Julian Tenison Woods and we spent many hours searching to find when his interpretation of the caves and their deposits moved from a literal biblical interpretation to an acceptance of Deep Time, and what and who influenced these changes in his thinking. Our paper examines the interpretation of Blanche Cave in the early days and how this has changed in light of recent research.

A few weeks ago, Andy Spate posted a request on the ACKMA email list to vote for Claire Preece, hospitality manager at Kents Cavern in the UK, for a Tourism Superstar award. In another win for cave tourism, Claire was voted the Mirror Travel's Tourism Superstar 2013. The website made special mention of the votes Claire received from Australia; well done to all who took the time to vote.

Congratulations to Claire Preece, who is the winner of Visit England and Mirror Travel's Tourism Superstar 2013 competition. Claire, 39, is hospitality manager at the Kents Cavern prehistoric cave attraction in Torquay and came top in a public vote run by the national tourist board in partnership with the Daily Mirror. The

award – inaugurated last year – recognises the unsung holiday heroes who ensure visitors in England have an unforgettable experience. Ten shortlisted candidates were featured in a video on the Mirror Travel website, with readers voting for the one they thought deserved to be crowned Tourism Superstar 2013. Claire, from Paignton, is responsible for organising and hosting anything from concerts to guided tours at the family-run site. “I am absolutely delighted to win this prestigious award,” said Claire, who is expecting her first child in May. “I’d like to thank all the people who voted for me. I love my job here and I’ve got a dedicated team at the caves delivering an outstanding experience, including, of course, our friend Cavog the Caveman! Kents Cavern is an innovative and exciting attraction and so important to the vitality of this region. I am really chuffed that this award is as much about giving a boost to the English Riviera and Devon as it is about me.”

She was nominated by Laura Holt, of the Devon Tourism Partnership, and even received votes from staff at tourist caves in Australia. VisitEngland chairman Lady Cobham said: “Warmest congratulations to Claire – a very worthy winner! As VisitEngland’s Tourism Superstar 2013, Claire embodies the passion and dedication that abounds in England’s tourism industry. She is an example to others striving to achieve excellence in customer service and a credit to Kents Cavern.”



Claire Preece with Cavog the Caveman.

Cathie Plowman has provided some notes on Tasmanian happenings in caves and karst.

- Southern Tasmanian Caverneers are continuing their survey of the 23 km long Exit Cave. Currently there is a one week survey expedition in the cave which is being coordinated by Tony Veness (STC).
- Trees planted a couple of years ago on the former grazing paddock adjacent to Baldocks Cave are progressing well. This project was funded with monies obtained by the volunteer group KarstCare.

- The Parks and Wildlife Service have obtained funds for rubbish clearing, tree planting and fencing off the creek on a former farm paddock that is now part of the Gunns Plains State Reserve. The result will be cattle grazing away from the creek, and the creek protected and rehabilitated. Local cavers are assisting with this project.
- Interpretive signs were recently installed at the Vale of Belvoir karst near Cradle Mountain. This karst has been acquired by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy.
- And besides nursing, I’m working on an interpretive book on glowworms that’s been in my head for several years and is on track for being published later this year. Southern Tasmanian Caverneers are continuing their survey of the 23 km long Exit Cave. Currently there is a one week survey expedition in the cave which is being coordinated by Tony Veness (STC).



*David Butler and friends at Mersey Hill.
Photo: Cathie Plowman*

Anne Wood reported vandalism that has occurred at Giants Cave, Margaret River in Western Australia.

Some unknown person(s) broke into Giants Cave in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park during the night on 2 March. They threw large logs into the long drop toilets, and also threw logs down into the cave entrance. These logs bounced on the way down and caused damage to the handrails and stairs and the abseil landing platform. Further into the cave there was some damage to stalactites. Several newly broken pieces were found on the cave floor. So although it is very disappointing I guess we should be thankful that there was not more damage.

I look forward to seeing many ACKMA members in Waitomo in May.