

## JENOLAN CAVES FLOOD DAMAGE

Sasa Kennedy

On Saturday night 23 February Jenolan Caves was hit by 124mm rain, causing flash flooding throughout the reserve. ACKMA members Dan Cove and Scott Melton agreed that, while they may not have been the highest floods in the last twenty years, they were certainly the most powerful.

A vast amount of sediment from McKeowns Valley has been deposited in the Blue Lake, creating a large gravel bar. Thankfully the resident platypuses do not seem to have been adversely affected.

However, there was large scale damage to the Devils Coach House infrastructure, with lights pulled out of the ground, taking sections of concrete path with them. Stainless steel handrails were also smashed by the power of the water and the debris it was carrying. The Coach House has many uprooted trees and other flood debris scattered across it. The Nettle Cave self-guided tour is suspended until repairs can be affected.

Carlotta Carpark had a major bank collapse following the rain, bringing mud and a rock of at least 3 tonnes down into car spaces (thankfully vacant at the time!).

In the caves themselves there was also plenty of action. The Imperial Streamway rose over the track and to the fourteenth stair, closing that section of the cave for four days. This was the highest water level recorded since 1998. Interestingly, the water level dropped back to the fourth step surprisingly swiftly. This raises the tantalizing question of whether the sumps between the Imperial Streamway and the Blue Lake may have been cleared of gravel by the force of the flow and whether they are now passable.

The track over the Pool of Reflections in the River Cave was also flooded for several days. It has been raining inside the caves also, notably at Wiburds Platform in the Temple of Baal, where umbrellas have been required at times to keep visitors dry!

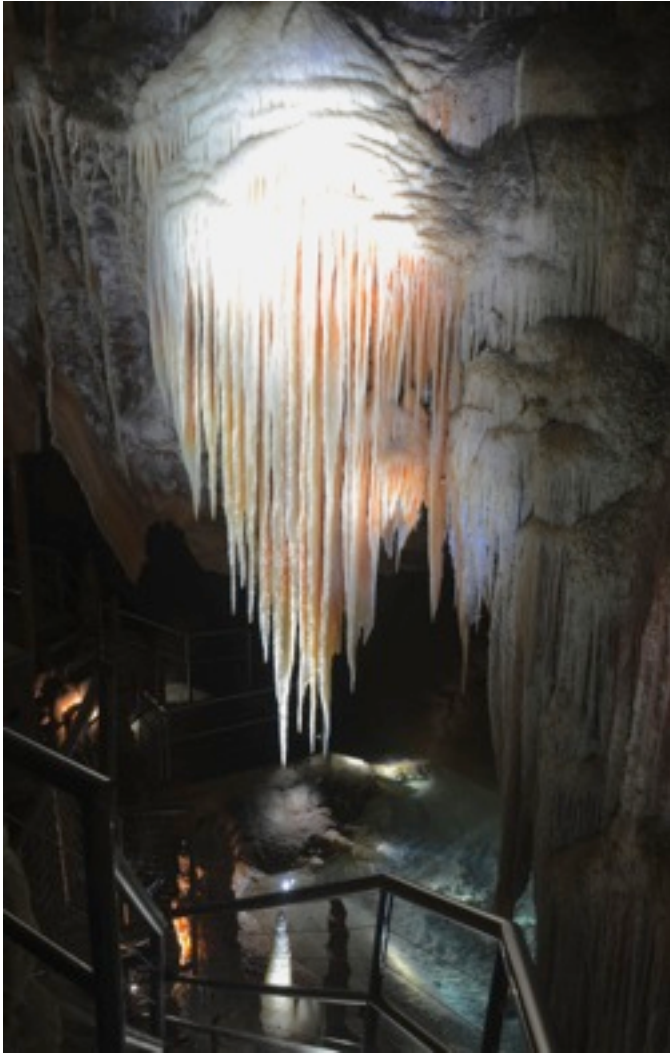
Cave maintenance staff have been kept busy cleaning silt from the pathways in the Imperial Cave and Jubilee Cave. Also bailing water from paths in Jubilee and Bone Cave. On the positive side, staff have noted formations which are active for the first time in collective memory. Many sections of flowstone have been self-cleaning and the lovely sound of rippling and dripping water is a pleasure to us all.

On Thursday 28 February the rain began again, with 40.6mm falling overnight and continuing steadily at time of writing. The water is once again flowing through the Coach House and water levels are on the rise again in the Imperial Streamway and River Styx.



*Left. Anne Musser with a dislodged boulder in Carlotta carpark.*

*Above. Debris in the Devils Coach House.  
Photos: Sasa Kennedy*



*Above. Pool of Cerberus.  
Photo: Sasa Kennedy*

*Left. Indian Canopy and Crystal Basin.  
Photo: Anne Musser*

*Below. Crystal Basin from above.  
Photo: Anne Musser.*

