

JENOLAN CAVES NEWS

Dan Cove

The start of the New Year has been busy at Jenolan. Visitors continue to come in increasing numbers, with the Christmas/New Year period setting a new 10 year record. Unfortunately the extreme heat and fire danger in January had a negative effect on visitation, particularly with the closure of NSW National Parks on several occasions. However, February has seen visitation rise to new record levels yet again. Meanwhile work is almost complete on the new interpretation of the surface trails with new signage and audio tour content available for free download. The audio tour of the Nettle Cave is now also available with the Gundungurra cultural version.

February also saw the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards presented at a gala ceremony in Hobart on Friday 15th. Jenolan was a finalist in three categories, and took out the Silver Award in each of these categories – Ecotourism, Cultural/Heritage Tourism and Adventure Tourism. This is a great tribute to the team at Jenolan, but also serves well to illustrate the breadth of experiences that are on offer at cave and karst areas when compared to other comparable tourist attractions.

In cave development news, a major electrical fault late last year forced the closure of the Pool of Cerberus cave, the only show cave in the Southern part of the Jenolan system to remain on the old 110v system. The nature of the fault was such that it was not cost effective to consider fixing the old system, the replacement of which has long been planned (funds permitting). Unfortunately, capital funds do not currently allow for the complete upgrade of the cave. However all old lighting infrastructure has now been decommissioned and completely removed from the cave. We continue to seek alternate sources of funds for a complete lighting upgrade and are hopeful that this will be a project to come off the drawing board in 2013.

The 2014 ISCA Congress is now starting to seem almost frighteningly close (November 2-8, 2014). International interest remains high. Any additional information (hopefully including the first draft of a program) will be provided at the ACKMA Conference at Waitomo in May.

There is nothing further to report on the ongoing process of evaluating future management options for Jenolan Caves. There has been a series of scoping studies and evaluations conducted over the past months. A decision on the next stage of the process is expected to be made over March/April 2013.

Proxy Forms

If you are unable to attend the ACKMA Conference in Waitomo and the AGM, you may appoint a proxy. A form was included in the previous journal and must reach the Executive Officer prior to the commencement of the AGM.

CHILLAGOE CAVES NEWS

Lana Little

A long-awaited lighting upgrade for the Donna show cave at Chillagoe-Mungana Caves National Park is now underway. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and private electrical contractors will be working together over coming months to deliver an improved cave experience for visitors to Chillagoe.

The cave was first lit in 1980, just 5 years after electricity was first supplied to the nearby township of Chillagoe, in north Queensland. The wet-dry monsoonal climate is not especially kind to wiring, and some of the light fittings are submerged during flood events.

ACKMA fellow Neil Kell drew up a lighting design for the cave in 2004. The plan at that time was to replace the old timber-and-pipe visitor infrastructure and the cave's lighting system simultaneously. The initial priority was the production of the lighting plan and plans for new stairs, handrails, platforms, catwalks and bridges. In 2007 the first of a series of funding allocations allowed for the infrastructure replacement program to begin. This was a project which would ultimately span four years – three of them 'flood event' years. During that time, the new stainless steel walkway sections were fabricated off-site and carried into the cave to be fitted, and old sections were removed. Gridded, gritted moulded fibreglass sections were used for step treads and platform decking. Most of the construction work was undertaken by local Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Park Rangers, with periodic support from contractors, for example when the services of a certified demolitionist were needed. During these construction works, only intermittent cave closures were required.

During the development phase, Neil Kell re-visited the site armed with up-to-the-moment information on new low-voltage LED lights and associated technologies, and re-worked some of the design.

In 2013 we will see his vision come to fruition. Tenders have been called, the electrical contractor has been engaged, materials ordered, and work has now begun.

We're sure to have a detailed account of how it all went in a future edition.

We need your email address!!

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