

# A TRIBUTE for LES WRIGHT: 1950 - 2013

Mary Trayes



This year's ACKMA Conference at Waitomo was overshadowed by the untimely passing of Les Wright, partner of ACKMA delegate Deborah Carden. Les went missing on the first day of the conference and was not found at Pureora Forest (south of Waitomo), until the end of the week by which time he had died of exposure having been lost in the dense forest for four nights. Local Search & Rescue teams worked hard to find him once his car had been located but as Les was lightly clad their work was cut out and they found him too late.

Although he resided at Punakaiki on the West Coast of the South Island, New Zealand, Les had met a number of conference delegates at different times including the 2011 ACKMA Conference in Tasmania, the 2012 AGM weekend at Wee Jasper and at Naracoorte in South Australia where Deborah has been managing the World Heritage Park over the past four years, and where Les had made many visits.

He first came to the West Coast in 1973 and spent his early years building a house, raising a family and worked at the local radio station. Then during the 1990's he branched out on his own, becoming a heritage consultant to such organisations as the Historic Places Trust, NZ Archaeological Association, Department of Conservation and local councils. He also served a term on the Tai Poutini – West Coast Conservation Board, an advisory group to the Department of Conservation where his knowledge and skills were put to good use.

In his 'spare time' Les wrote, or collaborated with others, on a number of West Coast history books and edited the large body of work Moira Lipyeat had gathered together about the history of caving in New Zealand. This was published in 2003 as 'Delving Deeper,' a book many of us have a copy of.

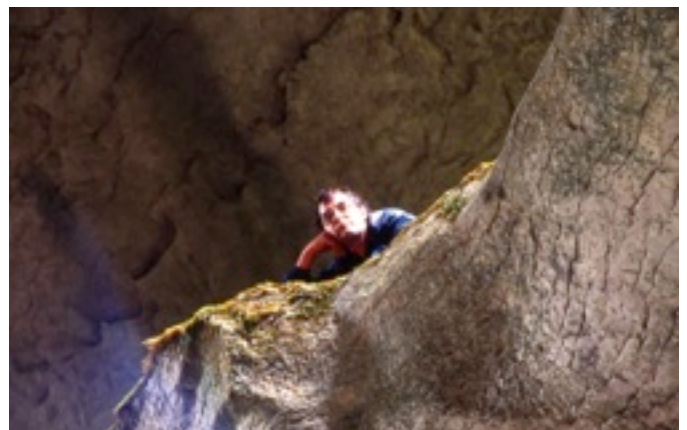
Living at Punakaiki with Paparoa National Park at his back door, Les was a keen natural historian and conservationist who knew the Bullock Creek caves very well. Xanadu Cave, with its top-level maze, was his favourite and many, many people have enjoyed a 'Les led' trip into the cave with some time spent in the 'humming passage' where his excellent singing voice reverberated really well.

Other things Les was involved with were quarterly publications of the tourism advertiser 'West of the Alps', and running 'Green Kiwi Tours,' a small business where he had a concessions to take people into Xanadu Cave and on walks and nature tours in Paparoa National Park. As a member of the West Coast Alpine Club, the New Zealand Speleological Society and Coast Cave & Vertical Rescue he was also often in demand for leading trips or his local caving knowledge.

At Les's funeral at Holy Trinity Church Greymouth at 11am on May 25th, tributes poured in from all sections of the community with some 'large as life stories coming from his extended family, the 'Friends of Waiuta' (an old goldmining town), the West Coast Alpine Club and ACKMA member Moira Lipyeat, who had made the long road trip home from the Waitomo and then over from Christchurch especially for the funeral.

The first verse of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'Kubla Khan' was read at the end of the tribute by local caver Warren Smith and twenty-seven cavers formed a guard of honour for Les as he carried from the church at the end of the funeral service.

*In Xanadu did Kubla Kahn  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.*



*Les on Tantanoola Caves walk 2010. Photo: Mary Trayes.  
Les in Big Arch, Oparara 1998. Photo: Kevin Dash*