

FROM THE EDITOR

The 2013 ACKMA Conference had everything that you would want in a conference on cave and karst management. The breadth and quality of papers was excellent; pre conference touring and caving superb; meals, accommodation and entertainment spot on; the local community friendly and welcoming; and organisation throughout ran to time without issues. Libby Chandler and her team deserve high praise for their efforts to showcase Waitomo and host such an excellent conference. Andy Eavis, President of the International Union of Speleology stated in summary remarks that the conference was one of the very best cave conferences that he had ever attended - high praise indeed. The unfolding of events with Les Wright going missing during the conference, and the very worst result announced on Friday evening, cast a black shadow on a great week. Mary Trayes offers a brief insight into Les' career in this journal. Our thoughts are with his partner Deborah Carden and family.

This journal is a celebration of the Waitomo Conference, the 20th Australasian Conference on Cave and Karst Management. Several members have provided reports on their experiences. I hope this journal provides a souvenir for those who attended, stimulates interest in Waitomo in those who could not make it, and shows the Waitomo community the impact they made on ACKMA.

Rohana Bell, Tour guide, The Capricorn Caves

When asked to write about my very first ACKMA conference it was difficult to know where to start as the experience was so diverse and so varied. The large amount of activities on offer was impressive and the people involved in the conference were welcoming and friendly.

I enjoyed the papers in the mornings, hearing about others people experiences and adventures was very inspiring. There were so many people with vast amounts of knowledge who were happy to share their expertise with our group. As a younger member of our team at Capricorn caves I wasn't sure how we would be received, but we were welcomed very warmly and it was nice to hear positive and encouraging comments. As a tour guide I also found the papers based around the tourism industry as a whole quite educational and helped give me a better understanding of the tourism industry on global scale. It gives me a better appreciation for what we do as tour guides and for the people we work for. I was proud to be included in this conference and glad that I was given the opportunity. I hope other Employers would consider encouraging there staff to join ACKMA and attend conferences as this was a great team building experience as well.

The tours and afternoon activities were amazing and it was exciting to go and see other cave systems. The guided tours of the Ruakuri Cave and the Aranui Cave were spectacular, both so different but equally as impressive. Even the scenic walk around the Ruakuri

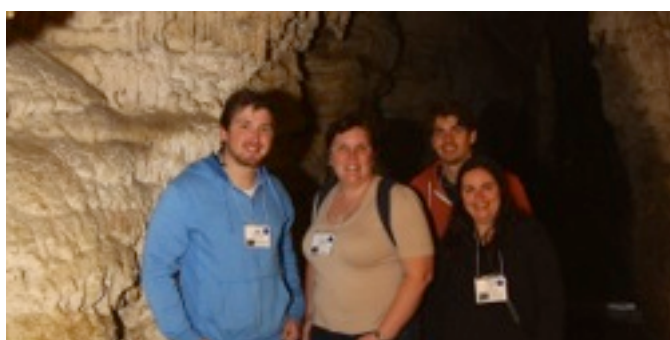
bush walk was breathtaking, the amazing guides at these caves made it very memorable. I noticed there was a huge amount of support from local companies and businesses and the generosity they showed by donating their time and resources to the conference. They also offered some amazing deals on the adventure caving options and went out of their way to accommodate us. I really believe that this shows the people and the companies involved in ACKMA really get behind the organisation and support these conferences.

I thoroughly enjoyed my first ACKMA conference it was fun, educational and a great learning experience. I look forward to attending more of these over the years and that really is the triple bottom line.

Lucas Zielke, Tour guide, The Capricorn Caves

What a thrill! As a group of caving guides from Capricorn Caves Rockhampton, whose "normal" idea of caving involves squeezing yourself through tight nooks, crannies throughout a cave, we didn't really know what to expect with the Black Odyssey tour. With nothing but excitement and adrenaline pumping us up for the trip, it was easily one of the most daring activities of the week. A series of overlapping, zigzagging tunnels, taking us 30 metres off the ground, from where we then hook onto established ropes and "make" like Spider-man, through the cave system. Not to mention, Abseiling a Swing and a few Flying Fox Zip-lines to get your heart rate up. Whilst being incredibly enjoyable, it was also technically, mentally and physically challenging. The Black Odyssey tour was an amazing and unique way to travel through the cave.

The design of the tour, how it is run and presented and the outstanding staff, made this adventure what it was and you couldn't ask for anything more.



*Some first timers; Jordan Wheeler, Amanda Hinton (second conference), Lucas Zielke, Rohanna Bell.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

Cathie Plowman, ACKMA Fellow, Tasmania

David Merritt had us clapping together to illustrate how glowworms synchronise their lights. Paul Williams gave a superb presentation on speleothem research and climate change. Cave guide Hiria Love lifted us high into the ceilings of the Glowworm Cave with her singing of Pokarekare Ana. These are just three very memorable parts from the recent wonderful conference at Waitomo.

Thanks to everyone who prepared a presentation as they were all great, likewise the organisation of trips, meals, hospitality, the staff at the Waitomo Hotel, the Glowworm Cave, the Legendary Blackwater Rafting Company and all the venues where we were hosted. I can't mention everyone, but they were all terrific.

I can't write about the whole conference, so just a few snippets.

Ruakuri Cave was 'under construction' when David (Butler) and I last visited Waitomo in 2008. The end result is a credit to everyone and terrific. I love the 'raw' feel of the cave, creating an experience where people can enjoy the underground, but where the cave has not been overly lit. You can't but be impressed with the spiral ramp descent, but the development also provides an extended underground experience without steps and that is accessible for those with mobility issues. Well done to all the team.

Mangapohue Natural Bridge is just beautiful. We saw the arch as part of the Caves to Coast afternoon that include Piripiri cave, Marokopa Falls and Marakopa Beach with the nice black sands typical of the west coast of New Zealand.

Pre-conference caving. The Legendary Blackwater Rafting Company made all their adventure tours available throughout the conference for the chickenfeed price of \$20.00 which included hot soup and toasted bagel

afterwards. The guides were helpful and friendly and accommodated everyone. I did the Black Labyrinth (twice!) which is the original Peter Chandler invention of floating through Ruakuri Cave on a rubber tyre tube with the lights of thousands of glowworms above. (Make sure that you tell your friends to do this and not to be intimidated by 'leaping off waterfalls' adventure marketing. It was easy. One group member did it with a walking stick.)



Wapuna Cave. Dave Smith and Peter Chandler took a group of five of us to this very pretty stream cave in the very upper section of the Waitomo valley, stopping to show us the two local very flashy cavers' huts on the drive there. Most of the trip meant wading in water, getting up to the waist in places, and even higher when I attempted the 'duck under'. The water was not warm, but no colder than Croesus Cave (my yardstick). Being in the water, meant we were up close to delicate straws and other beautiful features. For those of us who didn't 'duck under' the return trip up the stream gave us beautiful reflections that we hadn't had on the downstream

walk.

Mangapohue Cave. Angus Stubbs led us through this delightful stream cave beneath his family's farm. There were huge numbers of glowworms nice and low in the cave, so for the two hours or so that we were in the cave, we had many splendid sights of them up-close, their threads being particularly lovely when someone further away shone their torch on the threads. All very beautiful.

While my piece ends here, it was just the start of the conference.

In closing, our thanks to our Waitomo hosts especially for such a great event and also to all the ACKMA people who attended for their friendship and energy.

Coming Events

2013: 21-28 July	International Congress of Speleology, Brno, Czech Republic
2014: May	ACKMA Annual General Meeting and Cave Guides Workshop Yarrangobilly, New South Wales
2014: November	International Show Caves Association, Jenolan Caves, Australia
2015: October	ACKMA Conference, Naracoorte Caves, South Australia
2016: May	ACKMA Annual General Meeting and Cave Guides Workshop, Rockhampton, Queensland
	Do you know of an event that may interest ACKMA members? Please send to publications@ackma.org