

## ANNOUNCING THE ACKMA GUIDE FELLOWSHIP

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As part of ACKMA's role in encouraging ongoing development in cave and karst interpretation, the ACKMA Committee has decided to instigate and fund a pilot Guide Fellowship Programme. The Fellowship is to assist a guide's professional development by allowing them to spend time at a different cave system, exchanging ideas and experiencing different ways of working and interpreting caves. Up to three fellowships will be awarded in the first year. It is hoped that this pilot programme will evolve into a broader programme, available to all those with an active involvement in karst management, from reserve rangers and managers, to caretaker groups, students and scientists.

The ACKMA Guide Fellowship is not intended to supersede the range of guide exchanges which already occur more informally, but to be a more formal process, with specific outcomes, that benefits a greater range of ACKMA members and karst operators through the sharing of knowledge and ideas.

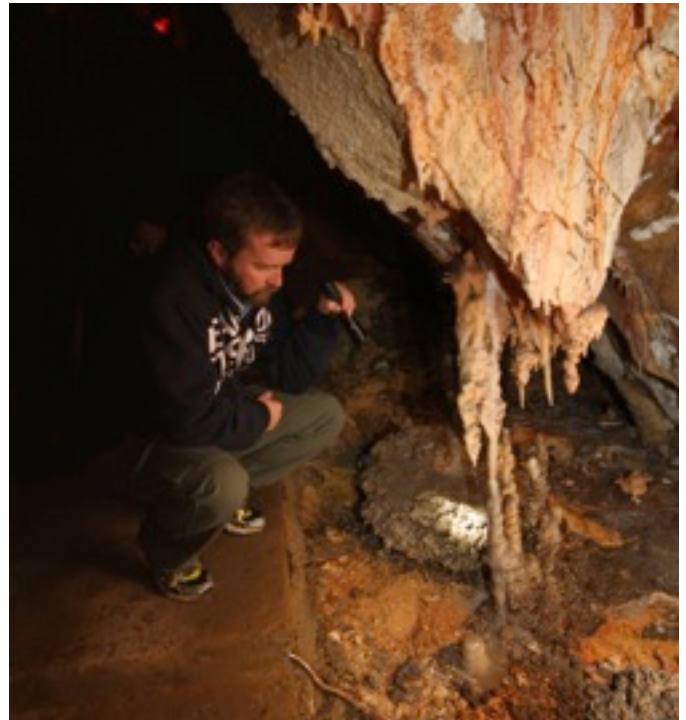
The idea of ACKMA funding such a program is twofold. Firstly, the role of ACKMA is to foster excellence in cave management. Contributing to the exchange of experience and ideas is a concrete way of achieving this aim. Secondly, in normal circumstances the expense of funding an exchange may restrict the ability of smaller cave operators, or casual guides, to participate in this type of exchange. With ACKMA funding up to \$500 transport expenses per exchange, it should ensure a more equitable program.

To participate in the program either the guide, the manager of the cave system which employs the guide or the manager of the selected host cave system must be a member of ACKMA. The duration of the stay is to be negotiated between the guide, their employer and the host, dependent upon the professional development needs of the guide. The exchange must have a specific learning or development aim.

ACKMA will facilitate the exchange and cover up to \$500 transport costs for the guide. For the pilot programme up to three exchanges will be funded.

Ideally, the guide's employer should agree to pay their guide for the days they are at the host cave system, or on a pro-rata basis. The host system must provide suitable accommodation for the duration of the stay. Most importantly they must provide appropriate opportunities for learning and the exchange of ideas.

In anticipation of a strong degree of interest in partaking in the program a sub-committee is developing a selection process. Copies of the selection questionnaire will be published in the Journal and available for downloading from the ACKMA website by September. Submissions will open in December and



*Dave Smith, Wombeyan Caves in Jersey Cave, Yarrangobilly  
Photo: Steve Bourne*

close in March. They will be assessed in April and the successful candidates will be announced at the ACKMA AGM.

Guides who wish to participate in the program must complete the questionnaire, which will be used to select the successful candidate/s. They must agree to write a report on their experience and learnings, to be shared with management and guides, and with permission for publication in the ACKMA journal. All expenses must be receipted and the guide must complete a pro-forma financial report/statement.

Selection will be based on the quality of the application and the potential for sharing of information; the exchange of interpretive and operational ideas, and also on the benefits to the guide, their employer and the host system.

The Selection Committee will consist of the ACKMA President, ACKMA Interpretation Officer and a third, independent selector. There will be the option to change the composition of the committee when perceived conflicts of interest arise.

So guides, start thinking of ways to develop your skills; managers, start encouraging your guides to participate. Be ready with some proposals when the questionnaire is published.