

CAVES GUIDES WORKSHOP and ACKMA AGM: YARRANGOBILLY CAVES, NEW SOUTH WALES 2014

Steve Bourne

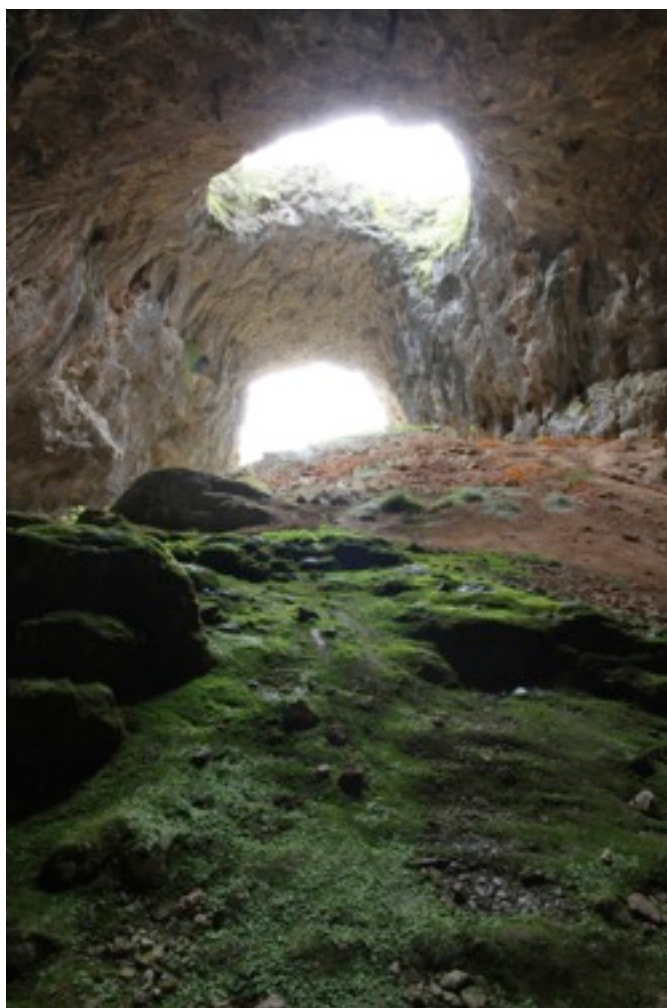


*The magnificent Caves House
Photo: Alexander Whadcoat*

The biennial Caves Guides Workshop and ACKMA AGM were held during the week of 4-9 May 2014 at Yarrangobilly. Holding these two events makes sense where it is possible as it enables participation in both with a single lot of travel expenses. They were previously held together in Tasmania in 2004 and are set for the same at Rockhampton in two years' time.

The Cave Guides Workshop was held first, with most participants arriving on Sunday 4 May. An afternoon caving trip led by Yarrangobilly Caves Manager George Bradford visited Mill Creek Swallet. A report on this trip is provided by Sasa Kennedy in this journal. On Monday morning, a *Welcome to Country* was provided by Sue Bulger, who works for NSW Parks and Wildlife Service as the Aboriginal Community Officer. Sometimes this important acknowledgement is overlooked. At times, it may fail to convey a really good message. Sue's message was excellent and reminded us that it's not just Aboriginal people welcoming us onto their traditional lands, but that the lands belong to everyone now and we need to care for the land and welcome others to share it with us. Sue repeated her *Welcome to Country* later in the week to ACKMA delegates.

The whole group then visited South Glory Cave, the self guided offering at Yarrangobilly. It has been relit with LED lighting and my first impression was that the lighting is perhaps a little too subdued for a cave of this size. I visited the cave again later in the week and noted how some people were struggling to see the steps. George informs me that additional lights are to be placed soon to improve safety and improve illumination of the cave.



*South Glory Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*

The group split and toured Jillabenan and the other half into Jersey. The brochure description of Jersey Cave reads;

Noted for its rare display of black and grey flowstones, Jersey Cave is home to some of the most stunning and diverse cave decorations found at Yarrangobilly. Cleopatra's Needle, a remarkable 4 metre stalagmite that almost touches the cave's ceiling is just one of the many fantastic features that you will see as you journey back in time.

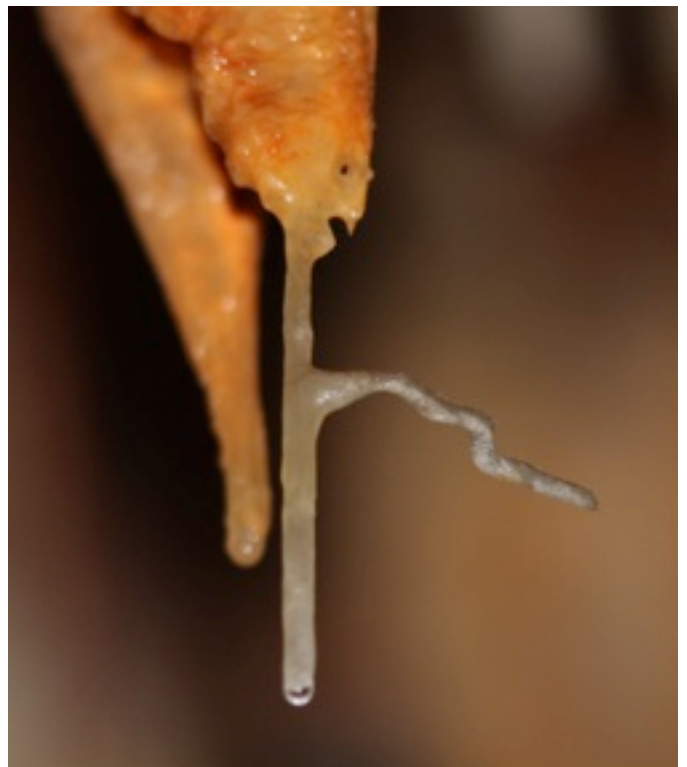


*Sasa Kennedy admiring Cleopatra's Needle, Jersey Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*

I was fortunate to have Neil Kell leading the Jersey Cave group and enjoyed Neil's delivery, and depth of knowledge of the cave and park. We had good discussions regarding the black and grey flowstones, which are likely as a result of bush fires in the past. Neil recounted the cleaning of Jersey Cave in 1996, when he and two others spent three months cleaning the cave from end to end. I am sure there are images of before and after their work, which would make interesting viewing.



*Above. Dogtooth spar crystal, Jersey Cave
Below. Helictite, Jillabenan Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*





*Above. Monitoring equipment in Harry Wood Cave
Below. "Stalagmate" in place monitoring drip rates
Photos: Steve Bourne*



I later visited Jillabenan Cave, and although it is much different in character to Tantanoola Cave in South Australia, it reminds me of this cave. This is because Jillabenan is a tiny cave, but extremely richly decorated.



*Monica Yeung delivering her geology lesson to (L-R) Ted Matthews, Ian Raymond and John Brush
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Cave guides at the workshop learning to make rope the Wogdali way with Talea Bulger
Photo: Alexander Whadcoat*

Two papers were presented after lunch. The first, Owls, Caves and Fossils, was by Steve Bourne, Liz Reed and George Bradford, and presented by me. Two years ago, I visited Yarrangobilly on the way home from the ACKMA AGM at Wee Jasper. George Bradford showed us a Sooty Owl which had taken up residence in North Glory Cave. I was excited to see dozens of owl pellets on the cave floor and Liz and I applied for a permit to collect pellets. George collected about 50 and sent them to us for analysis. Our presentation covered owls as biological surveyors, how different owls consume their food, what information we have learnt from the Sooty Owl pellets to date, and a summary of Liz's work in Blanche Cave at Naracoorte.

The second presentation was by Carol Tadros, from ANSTO*, on behalf of the large team that has been studying speleothems and drip water at Yarrangobilly for several years. Advances in technology now mean much smaller samples are required for analysis and greater chronological resolution is being achieved. As Carol noted, speleothems are providing an alternative to ice cores and other means to examine past climatic conditions.

Monica Yeung is a long term Yarrangobilly guide who wears many hats and brings many skills and knowledge to the park. Monica showcased the geology lesson she delivers for school children. This is an excellent and engaging workshop and I am sure all guides gathered some new ideas to take back to their worksites.



*Sooty Owl, North Glory Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*King Solomon's Temple, Castle Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*

Talea Bulger, a Wiradjuri Aboriginal woman and NPWS Aboriginal Discovery Ranger, presented the Aboriginal Cultural tour delivered at Yarrangobilly during the holiday seasons. This included a number of traditional practices including how to make a rope using the bark from stringybarks, how to make a fire by rubbing two sticks together (which I failed miserably), making an axe and throwing a boomerang. Talea has a fabulous style of presentation of what was an engaging and authentic Aboriginal experience.

George Bradford, Yarrangobilly Caves Manager, led behind the scene tours of the hydro electricity plant and Caves House. The attention to detail in the restoration of the house, utilising the best of energy efficient technology whilst preserving the heritage features of the house is a real credit to George and his team. One day I will convince George to write his story about the development for printing in this journal.

Participants were shown through North Glory Cave and asked to provide feedback on how the cave may be presented. The Sooty Owl was in residence with plenty of fresh pellets. This provides an excellent opportunity to interpret what was presented in the paper the previous day, with lots of props to support the guide. When owl pellets are presented as "vomit bombs" to school children, they are immediately engaged!

Castle Cave is an old show cave which is now shown as a torchlight tour during busy holiday periods. It is highly decorated including the King Solomon's Temple. Oliver Trickett's description reads:

From gracefully rounded snowy-white ledges, rendered luminous by myriads of crystals, which sparkle like diamonds, hang gorgeous, orange-tinted shawls. Under the canopy thus formed are grottos of exquisite beauty. No dream could conjure up any scene to outrival the splendour of this masterpiece of Nature's handicraft.

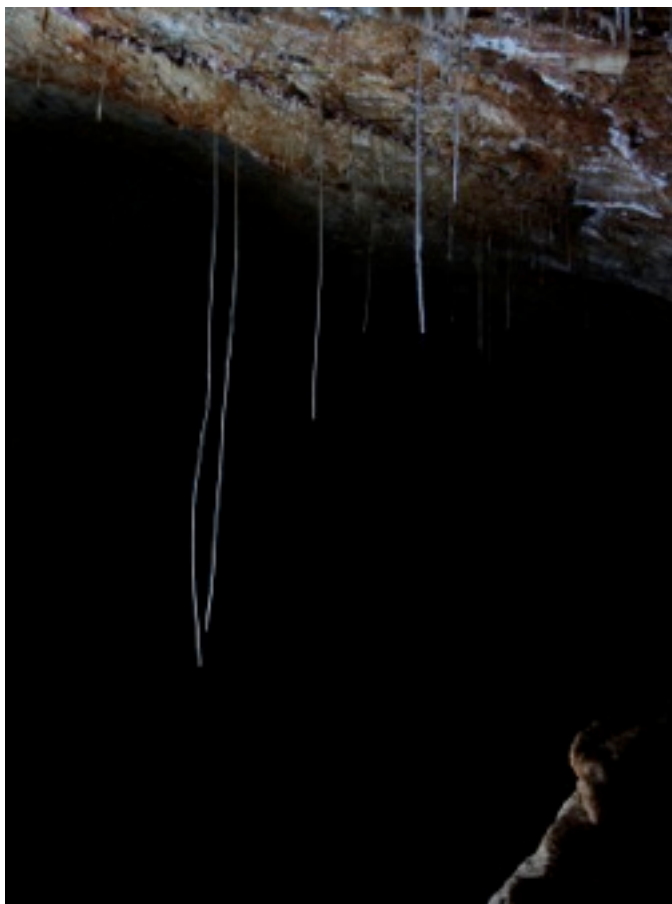
Compare this description to the current day description of Jersey Cave above!

I last visited this cave about 14 years ago and had always wanted to get back in there to photograph this feature, which I was able to do, while Andy Spate sat patiently as I took numerous images until I managed one I was satisfied with. Andy then pointed out a straw with a cluster of crystals hanging off the end of it, resulting in another lengthy photography session seeking that perfect image.

Harry Wood Cave is where the ANSTO team have been doing its drip water research. This research has been running for six years, probably the longest study of its type in Australia. The rate of dripping is measured using Australian-made invention called a "stalagmate".

John Brush and Marjorie Coggan lead trips into Restoration Cave and East Deep Creek Cave on Thursday. Restoration Cave is beautifully decorated. The entrance is a short scramble down over rocks into essentially a single large chamber. Access is restricted to the edge of the chamber with spectacular views of straws and large flowstones throughout the cave.

As I understand it, we only visited a small part of the East Creek Cave, but what a special part. Beyond the



*Straws, Restoration Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Tiny helictities, Restoration Cave. The image is
approximately 4 cm wide.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Ted Matthews and Sasa Kennedy negotiating a short
path to reach the decorated area of East Creek Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

gate we came to a detrog area, and with overalls off and clean shoes on, we accessed a small area of immense columns, flowstones and shawls. It was one of the most heavily decorated pieces of Australian cave I have ever seen and it was real privilege to be able to view it.

On Friday we visited Cooleman Plains and the Blue Waterholes area. This is a popular camping location which is closed during winter to reduce the amount of damage to the roads while there is rain and snow. The more energetic and nimble did a longer walk and visited Barbers Cave and Murrays Cave. Both of these caves are open access and receive lots of visitors, particularly school groups. Barbers Cave is excellent for school children with multiple passages, three entrances, climbing and squeezing, and little decoration, although the moonmilk has suffered badly from inquisitive fingers. John Brush set up a tape to assist with the exit on the gorge side of the cave and we entered via one of the two entrances on the other side of the hill. Our large group of ten split up and explored the cave, Laura Dawson, Dan Cove and Neil Collinson exiting the cave first and headed



*Blue Waterholes, Cooleman Plains
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Dan Cove demonstrating his acute sense of balance at a creek crossing
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*A view looking up the creek at Cooleman Plains. Laura Dawson provide scale atop the small hill in the foreground.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

up the hill for lunch. The rest of us left the cave and removed the tape, assuming everyone was out. As we were about to leave we heard a cry of “is anyone there”? Miles Pierce was still in the cave! The tape was hastily put back in place for Miles and we regrouped over lunch.

Murrays Cave was an hour’s walk from Barbers Cave over a steep hill and then along a marked trail. A large boulder had dislodged and rolled down the hill at one point, which had apparently occurred within the last month. It missed the track, but would have been quite an experience to be close when it happened. Murrays Cave is a simple walk along a stream passage with some interesting features. A quick visit to the old Coolamine Homestead filled in the day nicely.

The ACKMA Committee met on Saturday morning with the AGM held immediately after. A key decision at this meeting was that ACKMA offer a \$40 membership which entitles members to an electronic journal, with hard copies available for an additional \$35. Overseas members will pay a \$20 fee to cover postage costs. These figures more accurately reflect the cost of the journal,



the production of which has been exceeding membership fees by a considerable margin for some time. Only conference “profits” have enabled the organisation to function as effectively as it has. Considerable work has been done over the past 12 months in trying to get non-financial members up to date. We still have some work to do to upload the journal to our website and provide for individual password-protected downloads, which webmaster Rauleigh Webb has been working on. We are fortunate to have someone with Rauleigh’s skills and willingness to do this work for us.

Dave Smith and John Brush are reviewing ACKMA’s rules, a task that is overdue to ensure we are compliant with the Victorian legislation, as this is our home base. The Committee also recommended \$1500 is provided as fellowships for guides, to support exchanges or visits to other sites. See Sasa Kennedy’s announcement of this programme in this journal. Selection criteria will be developed and more information on how to apply will be circulated through the journal. It is important that this information reaches all guides. The Committee discussed that guides at some sites are not aware of ACKMA activities nor Guides Workshop that is held every two years. Those who participate find it enriching and worthwhile. Membership of ACKMA is open to anyone with an interest in caves and karst, and entitles you to attend ACKMA conferences. The \$40 membership with an electronic journal is an excellent way to keep in touch with cave-related activities and members can join the

email list and receive additional information circulated by other members.

I departed early Sunday morning with a 1000km drive ahead of me. Less than an hour into the trip, I had a setback 48 km from Tumbarumba, when the computer on my car decided that I was out of fuel, even though there was still plenty in it. The steep road must have jammed the fuel float and the computer registered the car had zero kilometres left in the tank. No phone reception and extremely limited passing traffic created an interesting situation. After about 30 minutes, a Snowy Hydro employee called into the parking bay and offered to bring some fuel back from the hydro station, saying he would be back in an hour. Two hours later and still no sign of my saviour, a 4WD and caravan pulled into the parking bay (the second car of the day) and fortuitously had some fuel on board. An exchange of \$50 for a jerry can of fuel convinced the car’s computer it had fuel and I was on my way. It gave me some time to write most of this report, but made for late arrival at home.

The week was excellently hosted by George and his team; Neil Kell, Ian Raymond, Monica Yeung, Margot Bulger, Sue Prosser, April McArthur, Jen Emerson, Larissa Lembke, Regina Roach, Rick Hargreaves, Nicola Beckett, Melinda Judd, Gilly Crundwell and Bernie Sims. The accommodation was excellent, the food likewise and, as always, the company great fun.

*ANSTO = Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation