

INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION CONGRESS JENOLAN CAVES, NEW SOUTH WALES, NOVEMBER 2014

Catherine Loder

Many ACKMA members found themselves amongst the crowd gathering at Jenolan Caves in November 2014 for the 7th ISCA Congress. Always keen to take advantage of any opportunity that arises to visit one of our great cave and karst locations, I signed up! This is a personal account of some of the activities during the congress.

Many visitors to Jenolan Caves arrived via coach from Sydney and this was the case for most of the ISCA delegates. Two buses departed Sydney for the Blue Mountains, stopping at the Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens along the way, to allow everyone to stretch their legs and eat lunch. The following stage of the journey into Jenolan Caves saw the buses come alive with chatter due to the impressive drops on the left side of the bus and negotiations with oncoming traffic on the right side of the bus. It is said that first impressions count, and the final sections of the road into the Jenolan valley, particularly observed from the higher and overhanging perspective of a bus window seat definitely starts a visit with the right impression!

The Gundungurra people welcomed ISCA to Country, officially starting the week long program. A display of possum skin cloaks with the story lines of their owners was available for congress attendees to look at during the week.

A snapshot of some of the presentations

Armstrong Osborne's keynote address on "Science for show cave conservation, development and interpretation" set a good platform for a number of the talks that would follow. His key message was that by supporting research projects, a number of opportunities can arise to improve the way sites are managed and research findings can help to provide a point of difference. Of particular focus during the presentation was the working relationship that should be developed between researchers, cavers, cave managers and guides. The better the relationship, the more information that is shared and this can lead to positive outcomes for all parties. Having learnt so much as a guide by spending many volunteer hours with researchers, I could definitely relate to the message of this presentation.

Kyung Sik Woo gave a very comprehensive presentation about the "Scientific investigation, monitoring and effective management of natural and tourist caves in South Korea." He shared information on the baseline studies undertaken and the ongoing monitoring of environmental conditions in South Korean caves.

The discussion of science based presentations continued with Julia James' "A review of environmental monitoring at Jenolan". In this presentation Julia went through the history and role of the science advisory



*Armstrong Osborn delivering his keynote address.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

committee at Jenolan Caves. Of particular interest during the presentation were the predictions of annual visitor growth and how this was going to be monitored and measured in terms of visitor impacts.

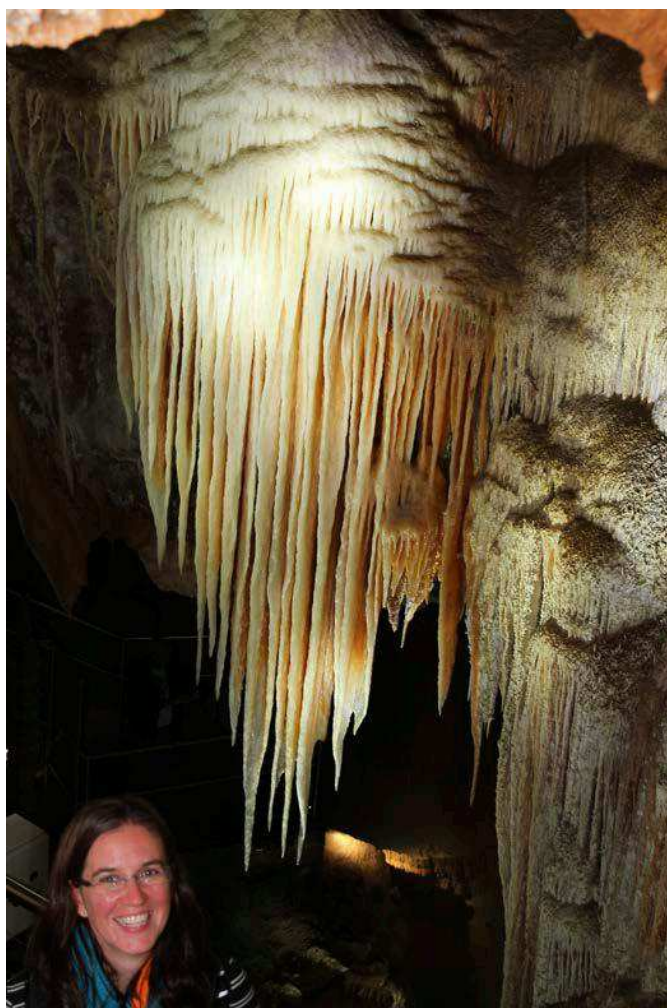
Cathie Plowman raised awareness on the impacts of coins during her presentation "Coins in cave pools. Is this an issue? Should they be managed?" "Giving many examples from across the world, Cathie covered aspects such as the historical context of the desire to throw coins and the potential impacts to cave structures and ecosystems. This presentation prompted the sharing of thoughts and opinions both during question time and into the lunch break that followed. Of particular note from the audience feedback were the socio-economic benefits through donation of funds collected.



*The Mulu contingent: Undi Mamat, Ester Abu, Alison Pritchard and Kenneth Nilong at the Pool of Reflection, River Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*David Summers (left) stood down as president of ISCA with Brad Wuest accepting the role.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Cath Loder at one of Jenolan Caves' features in Orient Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

Nadja Hajna shared the journey of developing and implementing “The concept of a new interpretative exhibition at show cave Postojnska Jama”. With a partnership between the cave’s tourism operators and the Karst Research Institute, a plan was developed to integrate cave and karst science into an interactive and interesting display centre that would provide an additional attraction for visitors. With limited space available for the development, a project plan was initiated, identifying the key concepts that the attraction would present and how this could be done in the space provided. The implementation phase of the project was ‘in progress’ at the time of the ISCA congress, with some of the display areas still under construction.

Maryanne Leigh from Acoustiguide showcased her products as a tool for “*Interpretation of natural attractions in the digital age.*” Through use of different media types the range of products allowed for meeting the needs of visitors with hearing or vision impairments and to reach further audiences through language diversity. It was

highlighted how the use of such technology doesn’t necessarily replace guiding staff, but can be a complementary product that can also assist with guide training purposes. With Jenolan Caves offering an audio guide for the Nettle Cave self-guided tour and an App loaded with multiple self-guided walks, there was prime opportunity for conference delegates to put it to the test.

Ross and Jay Anderson continued the technological theme with their presentation on “Utilising interactive digital media to promote, conserve, interpret and present show caves.” Words are unable to describe the fantastic 360° panoramas that the duo are producing. With a bit of assistance from the crowd during this presentation, Ross stepped through the process of taking a 360° photo. Take a look at their website to check out some of the work!

David Head from Weidmuller Australia spoke about the evolution of “LED lighting in showcaves – showing caves in a better light.” From train lights to cave lights, there



*The new Weidmuller lighting is superb. A scene in Orient Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

were more new lighting options on show during the congress.

Ann Augusteyn took attendees through “A never ending journey: Capricorn Caverns.” Capricorn Caverns has been transformed under the guidance of the Augusteyn family and dedicated staff over many years. Ann took us through the various stages of development that has seen the site prosper. A majority of the international crowd at the ISCA conference was from privately owned and/or operated sites, and as the only privately owned show caves on freehold land in Australia, this presentation really struck a chord with many in attendance.

A number of other ACKMA members gave presentations including:

Alison Pritchard, Kenneth Nilong, Undi Mamat and Ester Abu- “Mulu uncovered”

David Head – “LED lighting in showcaves – showing caves in a better light”

Pete Chandler – “Show caves at Waitomo, New Zealand with Glowworms of the *Arachnocampa luminosa* species”

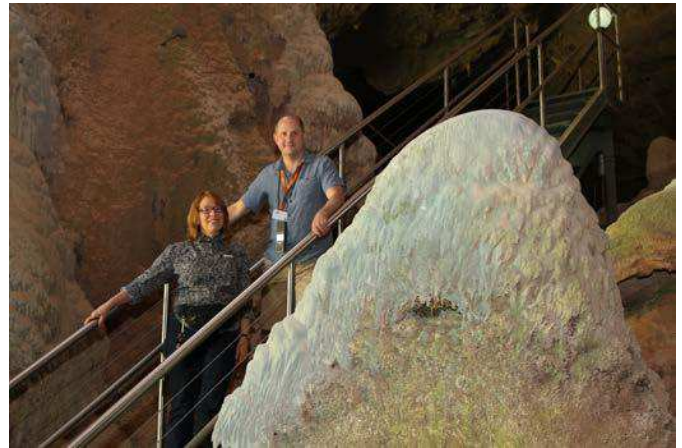
Sasa Kennedy – “Building cave guides’ interpretative skill base: some strategic initiatives to strengthen your triple



*ISCA delegates enthralled in Orient Cave.
It appears the week was taking its toll!
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Rod Graves of Leroy Caverns, Texas with a very friendly crimson rosella.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Anne Musser, Jenolan Caves, with Richard Bowerman, Stump Cross Caverns, United Kingdom in Nettle Cave
Photo: Steve Bourne*

bottom line” and “Looking to the past to provide sustainable show cave management into the future”

Scott Melton – “Digital media: A modern conundrum in an ancient landscape”

Steve Bourne – “Presentation of the Naracoorte Caves World Heritage Fossil Site”

In addition to the formal presentations, each show cave site represented at the congress had the opportunity to briefly introduce their part of the world. With representatives from the USA, Austria, Germany, China, Malaysia, Lebanon, Sweden, Italy, Czech Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, UK and more there was a whirlwind trip around the world!

Field Trips

Interspersed between presentations and formal ISCA business were plenty of opportunities to participate in tours. There were plenty of organised options for the

ISCA group, however many attendees also took the opportunity to join public tours that were available. Show cave tours, adventure caving, heritage tours, fossil tours, night stalks and garden tours were all enjoyed. The platypus in the lake was definitely a highlight, with several sightings across the week.

A mid-week full day tour to the Katoomba area showed off some of the Blue Mountains other attractions. People scattered in all directions at Scenic World taking in the Three Sisters, the Scenic Railway, Skyway, Cableway and walkway. After lunch, a visit to the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre allowed attendees to go through the “Into the Blue” exhibition. The exhibition highlights the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area from a natural and social perspective, using simple, yet very effective displays.

Overall, the ISCA congress was a great opportunity to meet many new people from all over the world.



*Tom Summers, Cave without a Name, USA enjoying Blue Mountains scenery.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Undi Mamat, Mulu National Park.
Photo: Steve Bourne*