

NARACOORTE 2015: 21st AUSTRALASIAN CONFERENCE on CAVE and KARST MANAGEMENT

Steve Bourne

It is hard to believe that it is 16 years since the 13th conference was held at Naracoorte. The 1999 version was actually based at Mount Gambier, with field trips to Naracoorte and other sites. The 2015 version was based in Naracoorte and two field trips visited the lower parts of South Australian and western Victoria.

A few keen cavers arrived early for some pre conference caving. I took one group while Clare Buswell from Flinders University Speleological Society (FUSSI) looked after the second group. My group of John Brush, Marjorie Coggan, Cath Loder, Sasa Kennedy and Dave Smith visited Beekeepers Cave on Friday morning, a private cave that is often used by scout groups, and less often, university groups. It is almost devoid of speleothem development, but is nevertheless a most interesting cave, with 3 main parallel passages connected by low crawls. It has an unusual entrance, twin solution pipes intersect a small "chamber" before descending into the cave proper. There had been some discussion in the weeks prior regarding scratches in the cave that were suggested to be made by the marsupial lion *Thylacoleo carnifex*. We inspected many scratches but it is difficult to assign any to a species, especially and extinct species, in the absence of any other evidence.



*John Brush (foreground) taking a photo in
Beekeepers Cave.*

Photo: Steve Bourne

cave, we spent some time digging marine fossils out of the soft limestone.

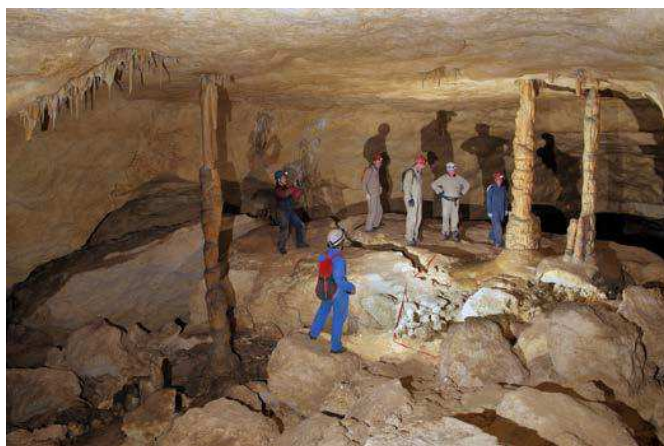
Saturday was a Sand Cave trip. I have a real liking for this cave, having negotiated access to it in 1997 after it had been closed to cavers since the late 1960s, and then negotiated to purchase it on behalf on the Environment Department in 2010. Miles Pierce joined our group for this trip. Entrance is gained via a 20 metre deep twisting solution pipe, which opens into a small chamber. A short crawl then takes you into a large chamber with enormous sand cones, which give the cave its name. I did not take my camera as I have plenty of photos of this cave, which allowed for more time for John Brush to exercise his camera trigger finger.



*John Brush and Cath Loder climbing into
Beekeepers Cave.*

Photo: Steve Bourne

The afternoon trip was meant to be into a cave in a Council-owned quarry. I had checked it a few weeks previous and decided it would be OK to visit, but had not ventured far in. The trip was cut short when I realised the cave had in fact collapsed not far inside the entrance and access was no longer possible. Unable to

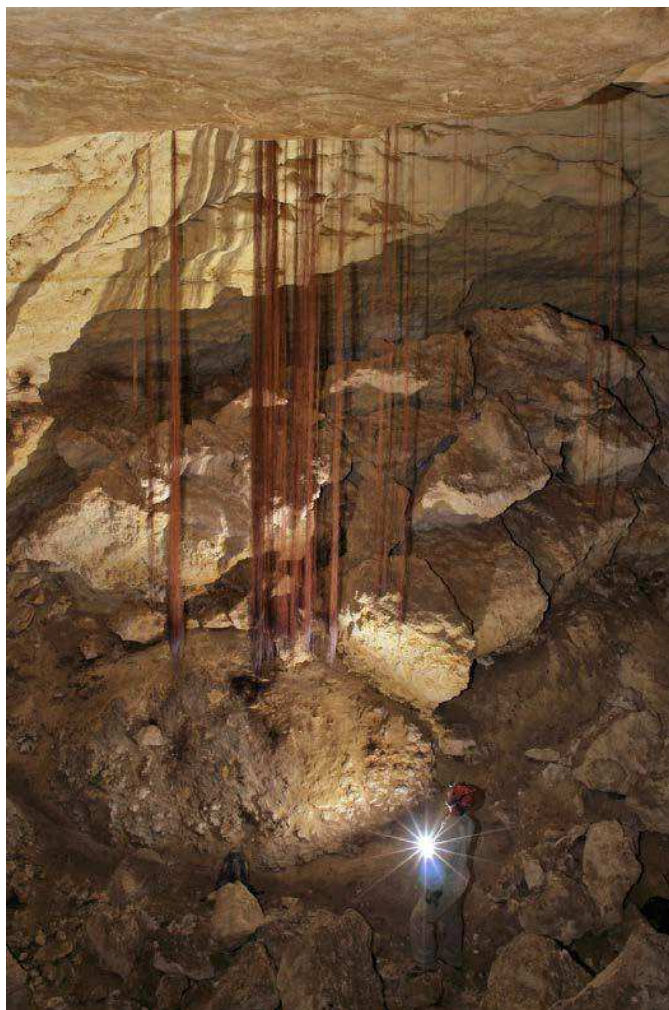


In Sand Cave.

Photo: John Brush

John, Cath, Dave and I took on the sand crawl, a long tight crawl which is now slightly enlarged after recent caving trips and some nervous cavers scraping sand to make access easier. We reconnected with the rest of the group and after more photos, set out to find the end of the cave, which I had been unable to locate on two previous trips into the cave. Eventually, I found the right squeeze and we visited the last large chamber near the end of the cave. This is very low levels of impact, as the cave was closed soon after it was discovered and is certainly worth keeping access to a minimum, and defining a pathway, to maintain its condition. It has nice speleothems and (almost) untouched sediment cones, some of clay and others of sand.

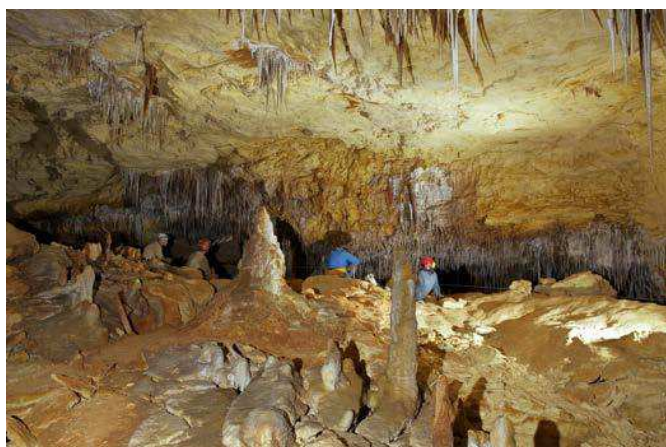
The Sunday morning trip was into Fox Cave on park, my favourite cave for taking visitors into while I was working at Naracoorte Caves. It is a reasonably complex cave (for Naracoorte) with excellent speleothems, tree roots and fossils. Like Beekeepers and Sand Caves, it also had scratches. The group became quite obsessed with finding scratches and tree roots, leading to the caving being named the “roots and scratches” caving trip.



*Tree roots in Fox Cave.
Photo: John Brush*

Prior to us starting the days' caving, I had given options for lunch, alerting the group that pizzas at the Naracoorte Hotel were two for the price of one on Sundays. Dave Smith thought this was a great idea, pizza and beer for lunch between caving trips. It was very pleasant, but drinking beer before a caving trip is not always a good idea. One of the group had to utilise a bottle in our next cave, Starburst Chamber, which is part of Victoria Fossil Cave. This highly decorated cave was a nice conclusion to three days of caving for my group.

Group “B” visited the same caves. The organisers are very appreciative of FUSSI and CEGSA members who made themselves available to take delegates caving.



*In Starburst Chamber, Victoria Fossil Cave.
Photo: John Brush*

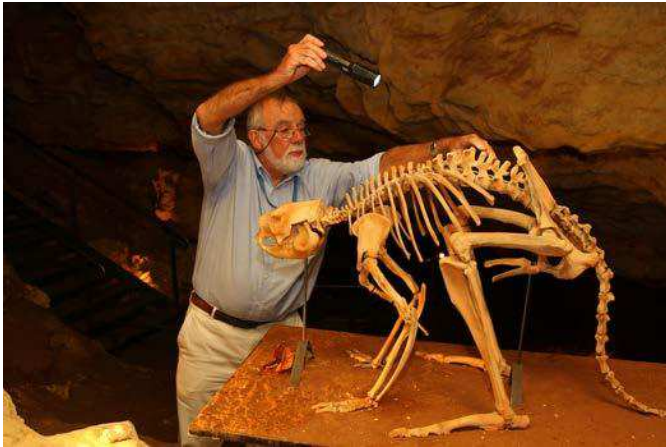
The ACKMA family gathered in the Naracoorte Town Hall on Sunday evening. The Hall was the central point for all talks and most meals, plus the wonderful *Sixteen Legs* exhibition. After convener Deborah Carden welcomed delegates, Ian Lewis and Ken Grimes provided a “geographic and geological” context.

On Monday morning, president Dan Cove opened proceedings and introduced Craig McGuire, Deputy Mayor Naracoorte Lucindale Council who welcomed delegates to the town. Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) CEO Sandy Pitcher provided a departmental welcome. Following these, we had the usual ACKMA conference scene setting by our hosts. Deborah Carden and Nick McIntyre, DEWNR, outlined the administrative arrangements for Naracoorte Caves with ‘*Caring for Country*’ - *Naracoorte Caves National Park and World Heritage Area (NCPN WHA) management and governance*. Executive Officer for the World Heritage Site, Amy Macken followed this with *Australian Fossil Mammal Sites - Naracoorte and Riversleigh - fulfilling World Heritage obligations*.

Rod Wells and Liz Reed then gave an overview of 45 years research at Naracoorte. For those who had never heard the Naracoorte story Rod was, as usual, inspiring, and

for those who had, the recent work led by Liz Reed provided plenty of interest.

Monday afternoon was a field trip to Naracoorte Caves. Rod and Liz delivered commentary at their respective research sites, Victoria Fossil Cave and Blanche Cave, supported by DEWNR guides at Wonambi Fossil Centre and the Bat Centre. All delegates were asked to be seated by 5.00pm in Blanche Cave for a special event. A few of us were aware of the event (as the photographer I needed to know!) but most were truly surprised to find themselves at a wedding. Andy Spate and Kirsty Dixon exchanged wedding vows in Blanche Cave with the ACKMA family in addition to their own. This was a first for an ACKMA conference.



*Rod Wells with Sthenurine kangaroo skeleton in Victoria Fossil Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

The *Sixteen Legs* exhibition was introduced by the newly married Andy Spate Monday evening. Andy had visited the exhibition in Hobart and suggested to Deborah and me that it would be great to bring it to ACKMA. With the support of the Friends of Naracoorte Caves and Naracoorte Lucindale Council, funds were provided to Niall Doran to assist with covering the cost of transport. Getting it to the mainland, and getting it set up in the Town Hall was a great effort by a number of people.

Tuesday was an all day field trip to the Mount Gambier region, visiting Princess Margaret Rose Cave on the Glenelg River cruise, Piccaninnie Ponds, Hell's Hole, Pick Swamp, Ewens Ponds and homepast Mt Schank. The karst features in the area are quite different to what most ACKMA members have at their home sites and the day was enjoyed by all.

Wednesday was a half day papers and half day field trip to the Sand Cave block and Bool Lagoon Game Reserve. I unfortunately missed this day, but once again, feedback from delegates was positive.

I made it back from Adelaide to attend the evening meal and after dinner talk by Naracoorte Lucindale Council CEO Helen Macdonald. Helen's talk was about partnerships and reflected on her time in Ghana, and some important lessons for partnerships in Australia.



*L-R. Ian Cathles, newly weds Kirsty and Andy, Helen Cathles in Blanche Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

ACKMA AGM

The AGM was held Thursday morning. Nominations were received for all positions except president. Nominations were called for and Dan Cove accepted to stay on for another year. The ACKMA committee is now:

Dan Cove	President
John Brush	Australian Vice President
Neil Collinson	New Zealand Vice President
Dave Smith	Executive Officer
Sasa Kennedy	Committee
Cath Loder	Committee
Tim Moulds	Committee
Grant Gartrell	Treasurer
Steve Bourne	Publications Officer

The locations for future AGMs and conferences were discussed with the following proposed;

- 2016 Capricorn Caves, Queensland
- 2017 Auckland , New Zealand
- 2018 Wombeyan Caves, New South Wales

The Cave Guides Workshop will be held in conjunction with the Capricorn Caves AGM meeting as it was in Mole Creek Tasmania in 2004 and Yarrangobilly Caves in 2014. This provides some efficiency in that only one host site is required each year and allows for some cross over in attendance.

Following the AGM, we once again boarded the coaches and headed south, this time to Tantanoola Cave and the adjacent Sibelco Quarry. It was my first visit to Tantanoola Cave since the LED lights had replaced the dichroic lamps. the LEDs put out much more light and most agreed that the cave now needs less lights than were previously in place. I had wondered how LEDs would look in this cave, but the colour temperature selected is good and cave looks good. One challenge in this highly decorated cave is minimising the impact of light fittings on what the visitor sees - a very challenging task.



*ACKMA members in Tantanoola Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*The challenge of disguising light fittings when there is
no where to hide them.
Does it matter? Tantanoola Cave.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

After the cave and quarry visit, we travelled to the “Main Corner”, the excellent visitor centre in Mount Gambier. Here we were given a welcome to country and discussed Indigenous culture and connections, and viewed the excellent film *Volcano*, which tells the story of the eruptions that created Mount Gambier.

The conference dinner was held on this evening at “The Barn”, a restaurant renowned for its excellent steak. It did not disappoint on this occasion either. DEWNR Regional Manager Tim Collins was the dinner speaker and did an excellent job, but was upstaged by a very humorous Mount Gambier Mayor Andrew Lee.

All too soon Friday arrived. Does time speed up for an ACKMA conference? The morning paper session included two papers exploring the role of ACKMA and included a short workshop on ideas for lifting the profile, relevance and attractiveness of ACKMA to enlist new members and retain current membership. There is still work to be done and the committee would be very pleased to hear what

you think about how ACKMA is operating and what can be done to improve our association.

On Friday afternoon, we ventured to Elderslie Quarry, the site of the non-caving trip earlier in the week. Members were able to collect a few marine fossils as souvenirs and save them from being crushed as road base, with one particularly fine specimen saved for the evening auction.

The Wrattenbully Grape Growers hosted us in Schultz Cave. This cave was known by early settlers, but had its entrance blocked around 1918 according to local knowledge. During vineyard development in 2000, a bulldozer exposed the entrance once again. Vineyard managers Ken and Helen Schultz developed half of the cave with footpaths, steps and lighting, including a carved rock table, wine rack and rock seating for functions. It is used by the vineyard owners as a tasting room to impress wine writers, sommeliers and regular journalists, and sparingly as a function room, primarily for local fund raising events. I have attended several of these, and while I cringe at the dropped food and wine on the cave, it is certainly a memorable experience to wine and dine underground. ACKMA members managed to cast aside reservations and enjoyed sampling Wrattenbully wines and a powerpoint presentation by Treasury Wines Vineyard Manager Tim Fletcher.

The final dinner was held in the Town Hall, for which I was the Master of Ceremonies. The meal was followed by an outstanding talk by Prof Richard Mackay. Richard is a member of the Australian World Heritage Advisory Committee (AWHAC), and previous board member of the Jenolan Caves Trust. He operates a heritage consulting business and has completed some outstanding work in the field of World Heritage. I really enjoyed his expertise during the time I spent on AWHAC and ACKMA members were really privileged to have Richard attend the entire conference. Richard’s keynote presentation was titled *Heritage values: Immutable or carved in stone?* It was an excellent presentation that included advice on how you could claim condoms as a tax deduction. The things you learn at an ACKMA conference!

An auction was held of various items donated with the large fossil shell recovered from the quarry making \$60 - nice buying Dirk Stoeffels! Purchasers of items had the choice of directing their money to either Niall Doran’s Bookend Trust or the ACKMA Life Members Fund. Most people split the money and over \$500 was raised for each cause.

I took a few hardy souls on one last caving trip into Cathedral Cave on Saturday morning.

The conference attracted a smaller number of delegates (about 60) than the previous six conferences. Of these, only a small number are actually directly involved in cave and karst management. It did not impact on the conference though, which was well planned and coordinated by Deborah Carden and her team. The Caves Cafe team from the Naracoorte Caves National Park prepared the majority of the meals and did a fine



*Dining in the Town Hall with the
Sixteen Legs exhibition in the background.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*Niall Doran introducing Sixteen Legs exhibition.
Photo: Steve Bourne*



*ACKMA members enjoying an afternoon tea of
Wrattonbully wines and nibbles in
Schultzs Cave, near Naracoorte.
Photo: Steve Bourne*

job. The Caves staff also looked after the bar and did an enormous amount of work contributing to the successful event. Very pleasingly for treasurer Grant Gartrell, the conference made a small profit despite very little financial sponsorship. This is a credit to the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources which provided staff time and undertook so much of the work themselves.

A limerick from the conference dinner for Andy Spate and Kirsty Dixon

*There is an old caver named Andy,
Who when in the west was randy,
But in Naracoorte,
He did what he ought,
A wedding, now all's fine and dandy!*

BACK COVER: 2015 ACKMA Conference delegates

Seated L-R. Miles Pierce, Julia James, John Brush, Ann Augusteyn, Mary Traves, Deborah Carden (Convener), Dave Smith, Katrina Wills, Cathie Plowman, Judy Chistensen.

Standing L-R. Niall Doran, Brett Farquarson, Sasa Kennedy, Graham Pilkington, Amy Macken, Peter Chandler, Andy Spate, Savannah McGuirk, Ted Richards, Carl Taylor, Marjorie Coggan, John Ash, Lily Petrovic, Dan Cove, Dirk Stoeffels, Greg Martin, Rauleigh Webb, Sam Webb, Tim Moulds, Cath Loder, Amanda Hilton, Kirsty Dixon, Grant Gartrell, Richard Mackay, Regina Roach, Judith Dixon, Tim Featonby, Rhonwen Pierce, Rosemary Hatfull, Josh Fisher, Robert Tah, Ruth Lawrence, Steve Bourne, Ken Grimes, Dale Calnin, Kevin Mott, Anne Musser, Nick Heath, Pat Culberg, Tony Culberg, David Butler, Barry Richard, Lisa Brooks