

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Dan Cove



*A presidential opening: Dan Cove at ACKMA 2015
Photo: Steve Bourne*

It is, of course, impossible to commence this report with anything other than the recent passing of Elery Hamilton-Smith. I will not write about Elery at any length at this time. The next edition of the ACKMA journal, fittingly the auspicious edition 100, will fittingly celebrate the life and achievements of the 'father of ACKMA'. For now, I shall simply sum up the innumerable tributes that have been flowing in to say that if we are all the sadder for the loss of Elery, it is simply because we were all of us made so much the richer for having known him just as the world itself is the richer for his life and his legacy. Vale.

It was a pleasure for me to have attended the recent ACKMA Conference at Naracoorte. The gathering of the ACKMA family is always a special time, and a time for the pleasure of renewing friendships as well as attending to the serious and consequential matters of the Association. Naracoorte 2015 was no exception, with a particularly fine balance of field trips and an engaging speakers' program. The smooth running of the conference was a great tribute to the organising committee led by Deborah Carden and including Steve Bourne, Amy Macken, Ken Grimes, Grant Gartrell and Ian Lewis. There were many highlights of the conference, but perhaps none to top the beautiful surprise wedding of Andy and Kirsty – a moment that

will never be forgotten by those of us fortunate enough to be present in Blanche Cave. There was also a great deal of serious Association business, with the new Rules being accepted by the membership and with the formation of the new ACKMA committee. I was honoured to be renominated as President, and to be able to continue to work with the fine group that makes up the Executive.

It was a timely and productive exercise to have engaged in the level of debate and discussion throughout the week of the conference regarding the core purposes and challenges faced by the Association. It is firmly my belief that all professional associations should not be afraid of introspection and critical examination, as reluctance to consider a problem leads to stagnation and ultimately decline. Behind the healthy debate there was certainly a clear agreement that ACKMA remains a necessary and relevant body, albeit one that faces challenges of communication, focus and how best to offer advocacy and support. These challenges, and the suggestions made during the conference, will be taken up and worked through by the incoming Executive Committee.

The next 12 months will also see the Executive continue to address some elements of structural and operational reform to ACKMA, with a continuing review of membership costs and benefits and ongoing work on the new membership database system. The Association remains in a sound financial position, a credit to the work of Treasurer Grant Gartrell, but the Executive has committed to taking a more strategic approach to the financial future with a budget review and implementation of more structured processes for allocating financial resources. This review process will provide a clearer foundation upon which the Association can make future decisions and move forward.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Ann Augusteyn and the fabulous team at Capricorn Caves who celebrated a Bronze Award at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards earlier this year. I can attest from personal experience that these awards are intensely competitive and the process of becoming a finalist is long and demanding. Only tourist attractions that meet the very highest standards and that have genuinely demonstrated excellence and innovation well above the average compete at so high a level, and to win a Bronze Award is a remarkable achievement. It is always wonderful to see show caves being featured prominently on the national tourism landscape, and all credit goes to Capricorn Caves for taking centre stage in 2015. I am already excited at the prospect of seeing first hand the many changes and improvements at the site during the 2016 AGM weekend.